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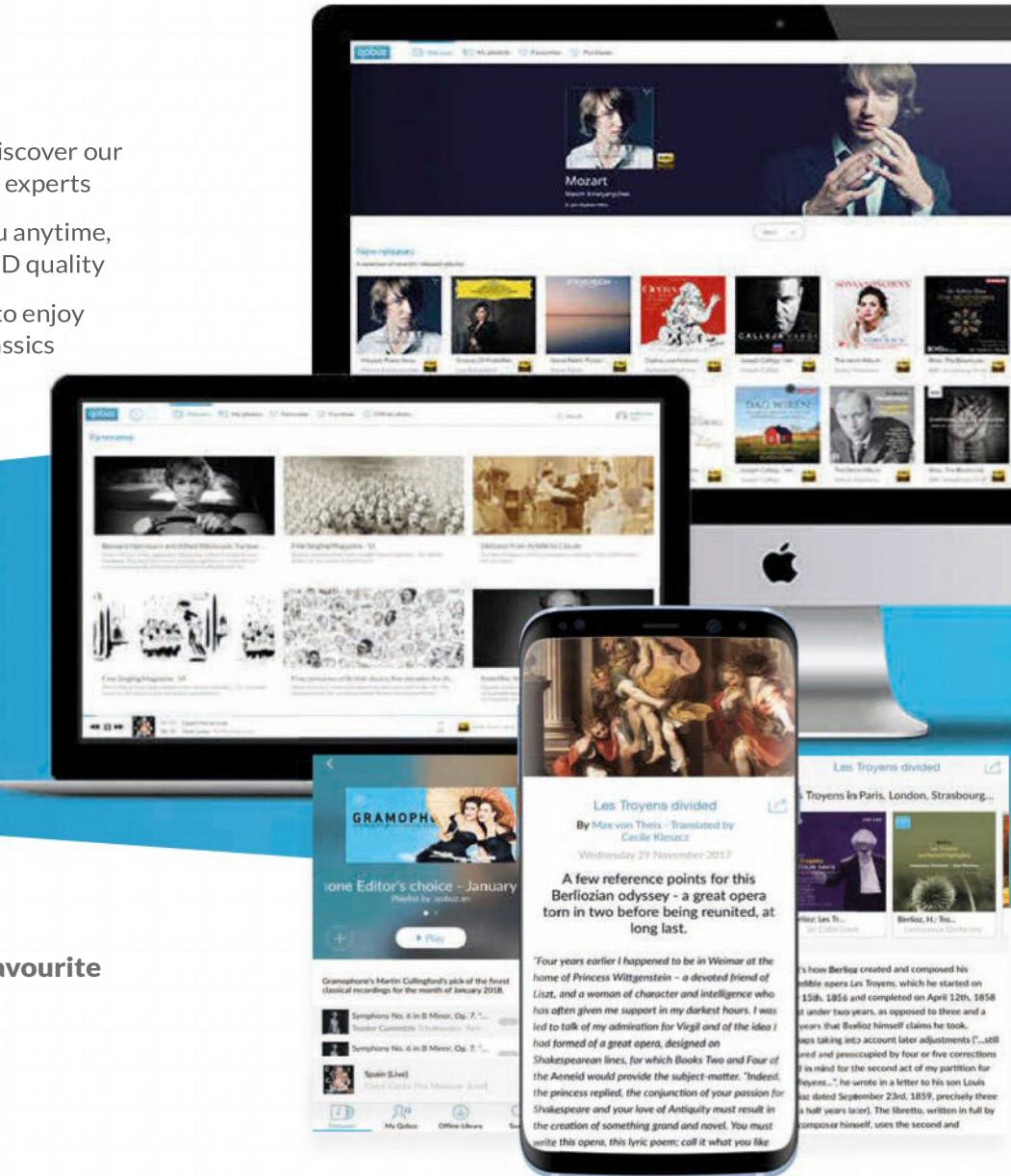
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# GRAMOPHONE



## SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

### Crozier

'East of the Sun & West of the Moon'  
Symphony No 1, 'Triptych for Orchestra'<sup>a</sup>.  
Ballade: A Tale after the Brothers Grimm<sup>b</sup>  
**Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Gerard Schwarz;**  
**Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra / Stanislav Vavřínek**  
Navona  NV6137 (46' • DDD)



Daniel Crozier (b1965) has composed three one-act operas – the most recent, *With Blood, With Ink* (1993), issued by Albany in 2014 – as well as orchestral, chamber and vocal works, but few in the standard large instrumental genres: no concertos or string quartets, a single sonata (cello and piano, 1986), a trio (oboe, clarinet and bassoon, 1988) and a prelude and fugue (organ, 1985). Although the forms into which he casts his works might therefore seem unorthodox, his musical language is solidly based (as befits a graduate of the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins), harmonically tonal and imaginatively scored.

Symphony No 1, subtitled *Triptych for Orchestra*, is not listed on the composer's website ([danielcrozier.com](http://danielcrozier.com)) under either title. Its three constituent movements are listed individually, as they were composed: 'Ceremonies' in 1998, the exuberant 'Capriccio' in 2002 and 'Fairy Tale: East of the Sun & West of the Moon' in 2003. They were also not recorded together: 'Ceremonies' was set down in June 2001 as part of a project with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, who returned with Schwarz to record the rest in September 2007. There is no disguising the differences in production; 'Capriccio' and 'Fairy Tale' sound brighter and better focused than 'Ceremonies'. Despite this, the performance holds together overall and there is a clear, satisfying symphonic progression throughout, albeit manifestly narrative in character.

Crozier's musical language in the symphony has resonances of earlier

### GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

#### Giselle Wyers

The conductor of the University of Washington Chorale discusses their latest disc, *Resonant Streams*

##### This disc has a very varied programme. How did you put it together?

Varied, indeed! This disc features the choir's favourite works we've sung over the past three years. We wanted to explore a wide spectrum of what it means to be human, creating a sonic representation of life's many paths and encompassing a range from bliss to tragedy, from our emotional inner lives to the environment around us. I felt it was important to show that music isn't an abstraction. It comes from real experiences and it helps us to understand the world.

##### So would you say this disc is an extension of your choir's educational mission?

Absolutely, yes. University of Washington Chorale is an undergraduate auditioned chorus consisting of students engaged in disciplines across the university, including music. The students are passionate about world affairs, and they love singing in many languages and styles. This CD features works



in seven languages, ranging from the Renaissance to the contemporary era.

##### Quite a few tracks feature instruments.

##### How did you bring all of that together?

We are fortunate to have access to many talented musicians via the school's instrumental studios. It was thrilling to collaborate with current and former students in performing works for harp, strings, percussion and chorus.

##### What are the choir's future plans?

We'll begin making a fourth album this spring, including choral music from the Baltic states, and are planning to tour Estonia in 2019.

American composerly forebears as well as late Walton and early Tippett in places. It makes for an appealing blend, carried over into the attractive, dramatic *Ballade: A Tale after the Brothers Grimm* (2006 – Crozier remains coy as to which tale), beautifully played and recorded in Olomouc, Czech Republic, in 2016. At 46 minutes, however, the disc is short measure.

**Guy Rickards**

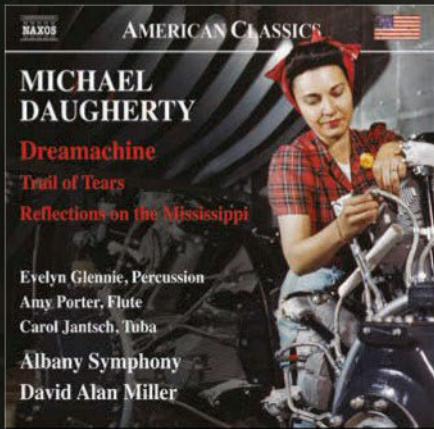
### Del Tredici

*Child Alice*  
*Courtenay Budd sop*

**Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose**  
BMOP/sound  1056 (134' • DDD/DSD • S/T)



Alice isn't the only one who finds herself immersed in enchanting and wild escapades in David Del Tredici's *Child Alice*. So do a soprano and especially an orchestra, who engage in glittering, bizarre and clamorous episodes that might prompt Mahler and Strauss to sit up and take notice. The Boston Modern Orchestra Project's superlative recording of this massive work – six movements and more than two hours of music – certifies the piece's status as sonic wonderland.



# DAUGHERTY

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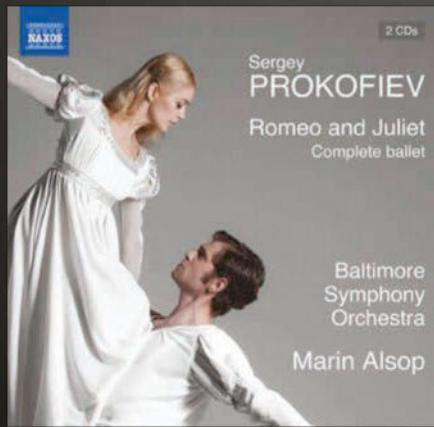
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Urgent expressivity: Krzysztof Biernacki and Michael Baron make a strong case for Szymanowski's songs

The score is the most expansive entry in Del Tredici's 25-year reflection on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The American composer won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize in Music for 'In Memory of a Summer Day,' which became the first part of *Child Alice*, here receiving its first complete commercial recording. The work finds Del Tredici in what can only be described as giddy form, as if he were a kid in an orchestral candy store.

There are events throughout in which the composer seems intent on outdoing illustrious forerunners in terms of colour and climax, and all the listener can do is give in to the riotous activity. But *Child Alice* isn't just about making a rumpus. As the soprano sings various settings of Lewis's preface poems, the music – unified by Del Tredici's beguiling Alice theme – casts a spell.

With the Boston Modern Orchestra Project on top form and soprano Courtenay Budd epitomising radiance and agility, Gil Rose conducts a performance of arresting character, finesse and instrumental prowess.

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Ho

Percussion Concerto, 'The Shaman'<sup>a</sup>

Arctic Symphony<sup>b</sup>

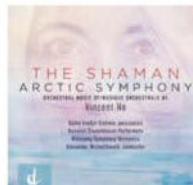
**Dame Evelyn Glennie** perc

**The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Performers /**

**David Serkoak; Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra /**

**Alexander Micklethwaite**

Centrediscs Ⓜ CMCCD24317 (71' • DDD • T/t)



THE SHAMAN  
ARCTIC SYMPHONY

ARRANGED FOR CHINESE ORCHESTRA BY

Vincent Ho

Soprano Evelyn Glennie  
Percussion Alexander Micklethwaite  
The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Performers  
Chinese Orchestra conductor  
Evelyn Glennie conductor

Vincent Ho (b1975) is a native of Ottawa, though of Chinese heritage. During

2007-14 he was Composer-in-Residence with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, for whom both scores here were created. *The Shaman* (2010-11) was written for and commissioned by Evelyn Glennie (and an array of Canadian arts organisations), and is an exciting, highly imaginative percussion concerto in three movements; or four, as there is an Interlude, 'Conjuring the Spirits', between the central Fantasia 'Nostalgia' and concluding 'Fire Dance'. As the title suggests, shamanism is the departure point for the work, vividly evoked in the opening 'Rituals' and exuberantly driving finale. 'Nostalgia' features a lovely, delicately scored tune about which John Corigliano writes effusively in the foreword.

Glennie is obviously much taken with the work (of which there is also an arrangement for Chinese orchestra) as her terrific performance confirms and she has played it several times around the globe. *Arctic Symphony* (2008-10) came about in

the wake of a sponsored trip to the north of Canada and is a programmatic work in five movements documenting what Ho saw, felt and experienced there: the central scherzo, 'Aboard the Amundsen', even depicts his time on the polar exploration ship of that name. Taped Arctic 'environmental sounds' and an Inuit chorus feature at the start and close, highlighting Ho's ecological concerns, though the symphony (in truth, more a tone poem in five movements) does not have the visceral impact of the concerto.

The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra give very decent accounts of both works though the violins are stretched and a little ragged in some of the difficult fast, high passages. Centrediscs' recordings, made by CBC Radio, are warm with good depth of sound. **Guy Rickards**

## Szymanowski

'In the Mists'

Six Songs, Op 7. The Swan, Op 7. Four Songs,

Op 11. Five Songs, Op 13. Three Songs, Op 32.

Seven Songs, Op 54

**Krzysztof Biernacki bar Michael Baron pf**

MSR Classics Ⓜ MS1608 (58' • DDD • T/t)



The Polish composer Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) is celebrated for his

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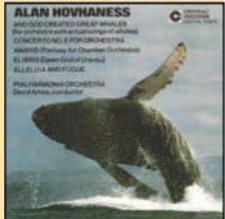
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opera *King Roger*, four symphonies, two violin concertos and choral and chamber works. He followed in the footsteps of such illustrious Lieder predecessors as Schubert, Brahms and Mahler by composing more than 130 art songs. Baritone Krzysztof Biernacki and pianist Michael Baron perform 26 of these treasurable miniatures on their new recording, 'In the Mists', the title derived from one of the Six Songs, Op 2.

The disc moves chronologically from those early pieces to the Seven Songs, Op 54, spanning most of Szymanowski's career and stylistic development. The texts are wide-ranging, comprising words in Polish (by Kazimierz Tetmajer, Wacław Berent and Tadeusz Miciński), German (Richard Dehmel), Russian (Dmitri Davydov) and English (James Joyce), an indication of the composer's broad cultural interests.

The songs are manifestations of Szymanowski's rich and increasingly exotic harmonic language and the narratives – often dark, sometimes childlike – give the composer the chance to spin phrases of penetrating beauty. The writing is compact and direct, with the musical lines wedded seamlessly to the words.

Polish-born Biernacki wraps his pulsating baritone around Szymanowski's urgent expressivity to keen dramatic effect. His English may not be ideally idiomatic but he treats each language with purpose and intensity. Baron is an exemplary partner, providing a fine sense of sweep and balances that allow voice and piano to interact as ardent conversationalists.

**Donald Rosenberg**

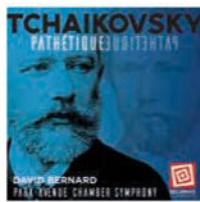
## Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74

Park Avenue Chamber Symphony Orchestra /

David Bernard

Recursive ® RC2059912 (45' • DDD)



In contrast to the rather rough-and-tumble Beethoven Ninth Symphony recorded by David Bernard and the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony that I reviewed in these pages (10/17), the same forces deliver, for the most part, an impressively elegant, thoughtful, well-balanced and sophisticated Tchaikovsky *Pathétique*.

My main reservation (indeed, my only reservation) concerns the reduced string

section, which cannot match their full-size orchestra counterparts in regard to projection, tonal allure, soaring sweep and assured agility. Still, the Park Avenue players compensate through carefully sculpted phrasing in the finale's thematic statements, their pointed articulation throughout the second movement and the X-ray clarity of the low strings underneath the bassoon solo in the first movement's opening *Adagio*. The orchestra approaches the first theme's faster variant tentatively at first but gain suppleness as the music progresses. A crackling outburst launches a development section that makes up in contrapuntal clarity what it lacks in dynamic force.

The second movement's outer sections take Tchaikovsky's *con grazia* directive to heart, with the melodies taking playful shape as they move over the bar lines. The same holds true for the middle section as well, where the normally dark and heavy timpani pedal point is pared down to a suggestive murmur. The finale's songful fluency and unanimity of phrasing communicate a dignified reserve that contrasts to the epic vistas, wide emotional swings and devastating peroration that full-orchestra versions convey.

It is in the third movement, however, where the chamber orchestra's downsized virtues shine. Bernard's excellent textural contouring gives bristling focus to the compound 12/8 and 4/4 metre, and the march theme's wonderful trombone and tuba parts emerge like newly scrubbed details in a restored painting.

One may miss the sonorous heft and large-scale dimensions of classic full-orchestra *Pathétiques* from Karajan (EMI 1971 version), Mravinsky (DG) and Solti (Decca), yet Bernard and his musicians frequently shed new and valuable light on a thrice-familiar standard, abetted by a recorded ambience that evokes concert-hall realism. **Jed Distler**

## 'Ancestral Voices'

G Cohen Three Goat Blues Farias Andean

Suite A Gottschalk *Imágenes de Cuba*

Jandali String Quartet

Apollo Chamber Players

Navona ® NV6130 (69' • DDD)



The third instalment from the Houston-based Apollo Chamber Players' project of commissioning and recording 20 new 'folk

music-inspired and multicultural works' by the end of the decade introduces four excellent new string quartets and writes a new chapter in Navona's commitment to the Cuban music industry. In fact, the label claims that Apollo's recording of Arthur Gottschalk's *Imágenes de Cuba* at Abdala Studios in Havana in January 2017 marked the first time an American chamber ensemble had recorded and performed in Cuba. And Gottschalk's infectious work makes the perfect centrepiece, drawing on Cuban dance rhythms and attitudes alongside conflicting feelings of nostalgia, pride and sadness for its past, and shouts of 'Cuba libre!'

Not recorded in Cuba, Gilad Cohen's deeply seeking *Three Goat Blues* succeeds at being an effective cover tune by drawing on an entirely different set of roots, represented by Passover prayers and fables, and by the quiet beauty he finds in ancient Provençal Jewish tunes. Malek Jandali's deeply enigmatic String Quartet in E flat, even when punctuated by a few probably inevitable Bartókian moments, speaks with voices and in tongues emerging from the composer's Syrian heritage that generously repay more reflective listening. Javier Farias's *Andean Suite* is almost, but provocatively also not, what you might expect from the raucous sounds of a ritual fight between a bull and a condor, sad drifting melodies from high mountain plains and a Bolivian dance from Carnival.

The sound for the Gottschalk is infectious, loud and fun. The sound from Clarion Hall at Brazosport College 60 miles from downtown Houston for the others is intimate and detailed.

**Laurence Vittes**

## 'Resonant Streams'

'Choral Music from Sun to Sea'

**Anonymous** Gao Shan Qing (Chinese Folk Song).

Idumea (Sacred Harp Hymn). Kristallen den fina (Swedish Folk Song). Mo Li Hua (Chinese Folk Song) Bouzignac Surge, amica mea Bradford

Give me the splendid, silent sun M-A Charpentier

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O North Wind Rist Invictus Rodgers Oklahoma! -

Oklahoma! Sariola Nouse lauluni Wyers And

love be written on running water

**University of Washington Chorale / Giselle Wyers**

MSR Classics ® MS1642 (56' • DDD)

Recorded live at Meany Hall, Seattle, May 28, 2014 and December 1, 2016, and St Joseph's Cathedral, Seattle, June 1, 2016

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The Apollo Chamber Players champion new folk-inspired string quartets – see review on page V



For its third recording, the University of Washington Chorale, an advanced

undergraduate ensemble containing students from all majors across the Seattle campus, sing a varied programme with sweet urgency. The performances are never less than earnest, although intonation can wander, and occasionally the effect is fresh and beautiful; the wonderful diversity of the repertoire is in itself exhilarating, with many unexpected discoveries.

The opening sweep of sound begins with Holst's *Hymn to the Waters*, ushered in by Sophie Baird-Daniel's Technicolor harp. More routine stuff by Bouzignac and Marc-Antoine Charpentier and a Chinese folk song lead to Fauré's ecstatic *Cantique de Jean Racine*, its sensual violin and cello solos nestled in the chorus's aural cloud.

The Chorale follows an enthusiastic performance of Libby Larsen's 'Comin' to Town', all about Midwestern high cool, cowboys and canines, with a sweet, girl-scout reading of the usually lusty chorus from *Oklahoma!*; they finish with a considerably more rousing take on *Nouse lauluni*, Soila Sariola's high-energy encore speciality crafted from throbbing Europop energy and the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala.

All the way through there are special moments, like the way the percussion slips in at the beginning of Lars Jansson's exquisite *Salve regina* and Sadie Quinsaat's heartbreakingly innocent soprano solo in a second Chinese folk song. The music was recorded in 2014 and 2016 at the Meany Hall for the Performing Arts at the University of Washington and at St Joseph's Cathedral in Seattle, and captures the size of the chorus with more emotional impact than musical clarity. **Laurence Vittes**

### **Songs of Peace and Praise'**

**Bright Sheng Two Folk Songs from Qinghai Brings**

**In paradisum Kraft Adam in Eden Mandelbaum**

**The Village - Finale, Act 1 Saylor Ave Maria.**

**Missa Constantiae Schober All Creation Sings**

**Praise. Curiosity. O day full of grace Smaldone**

**L'infinito Weisgall God is due praise (Ki lo noeh)**

**The New York Virtuoso Singers / Harold**

**Rosenbaum; Queens College Choir and Vocal**

**Ensemble / Bright Sheng, James John**

**Naxos American Classics M 8 559819**

**(58' • DDD • T)**



The title of this elegant new disc tells much about the nature of the repertoire. The subtitle is less specific: 'Choral Music from Queens College'. While the eight composers represented all serve or served

on the faculty at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, CUNY, their music has nothing in common other than expert craftsmanship and depth of feeling.

Stylistically, these creative voices travel in numerous directions as they forge expressive and lively settings of sacred and secular texts. The most well-known figure is the Chinese-American composer Bright Sheng, who earned his master's at Queens College in 1984 and served as Visiting Distinguished Artist in Residence in 2010, when he wrote his *Two Folk Songs from Qinghai* – abounding in colourful and piquant ideas – for the Queens College Choir.

But every work makes an impact. Three pieces by David Schober, the school's current director, are glistening examples of massed choral writing, while Bruce Saylor's *Missa Constantiae* and *Ave Maria* thrust ancient texts exquisitely into contemporary contexts. Short selections by Hugo Weisgall, Allen Brings, Leo Kraft and Joel Mandelbaum attest to the compositional skills of the Queens College faculty, with Edward Smaldone's *L'infinito* standing out for its adventurous harmonic language and deft evocation of an Italian landscape.

The music isn't the only distinction here from the Copland School of Music. The vibrant performances are sung by the Queens College Choir and Vocal Ensemble or by the New York Virtuoso Singers, led by Queens alumnus Harold Rosenbaum.

**Donald Rosenberg**

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## In the digital age, the album is very much alive

**W**hat does an 'album' mean to you? As a record-related term, it dates from when a set of 78s would be presented in a protective fold-out book. Like a photo album – only with record sleeves instead of images. In time, and with the advent of the LP, it became adopted by pop and rock, coming to mean a single record, but one which contained within it multiple songs, in a themed, unified concept. Singles may have earned bands airplay, but it was their albums which became the most iconic expressions of their art. (And, furthermore, the art that adorned them often became iconic too.) But while 'album' became synonymous with those other genres, it became less common to refer to a classical recording of, say, an opera or a pairing of symphonies, as an album. It was still applied, perhaps, to a well-chosen collection of arias or songs – though in a way that's the classical equivalent of a rock or pop album. But generally other words – LP, a set, CD – served instead.

But recently I've been hearing the term being used much more. One reason was the need to find a word to describe a release in the new digital age. If you're buying a new release as a digital file, or for that matter streaming it, record sounds archaic, and CD not quite right. Album seems more format neutral.

Streaming, of course, poses its own challenges to the notion of an album. Symphonies would often be paired simply to fill the space of a CD – but if you're streaming, and only looking for one work, in what sense are you listening to an album? But just as digital listening has paradoxically led to a renaissance in



beautifully crafted physical releases, perhaps it could have the same impact on the notion of what an album can – and should – be? Forcing people to question, if you're going to release a collection of works in one package, what ties it all together, and how you present it. This can take many forms – perhaps even be one work, as with Teodor Currentzis's recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, our Recording of the Month in January. At 46 minutes, it's shorter than most releases we cover. But it not only felt it didn't need to be any longer, but the inclusion of anything else would have, in my mind, diminished its impact. Listening to this issue's Recording of the Month – Murray Perahia's recording of Beethoven's *Moonlight* and *Hammerklavier* sonatas – it feels as appropriate a pairing as, say, Barbirolli's pairing of Elgar's Cello Concerto and his *Sea Pictures*. Another superb release this month – Kirill Gerstein's 'The Gershwin Moment' – perfectly encapsulates the notion of a thought-through album, with longer works, shorter pieces and guest artists mixed together to create a richly satisfying whole, illustrated with specially commissioned art work. Meanwhile, the debut release from Decca's new cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason – whose contents range from a core concerto to a Bob Marley transcription – is simply presented under the title 'Inspiration'. This very much feels like a thought-out, themed album, and remarkably entered the UK album charts – of *all* genres – at No 20. I'm quite sure calling it Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No 1 wouldn't have had the same impact. I'd say there's life in the album yet.

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### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Having the opportunity to speak with leading Debussy interpreters for this

month's cover story was a joy,' says **MARK PULLINGER**.

'It whetted my appetite for the planned centenary concerts and sent me scuttling to listen to my interviewees' favourite recordings.'



'It has been a great pleasure to revisit Cathy Berberian's recordings,' says **EDWARD BREEN**, author

of this issue's Icons feature dedicated to the mezzo and composer. 'She was an incredible communicator in music from Monteverdi to Berio. I can almost taste the words that she sings.'



'When I first saw *Don Giovanni* at Glyndebourne,' recalls **RICHARD LAWRENCE**, author of March's Collection, 'the cast included Mirella Freni, Geraint Evans and Richard Lewis, who are all on the CD recording from Covent Garden. Memory lane! But investigating some 30 other versions has been a treat.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman  
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)  
Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows  
David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood  
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Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers  
John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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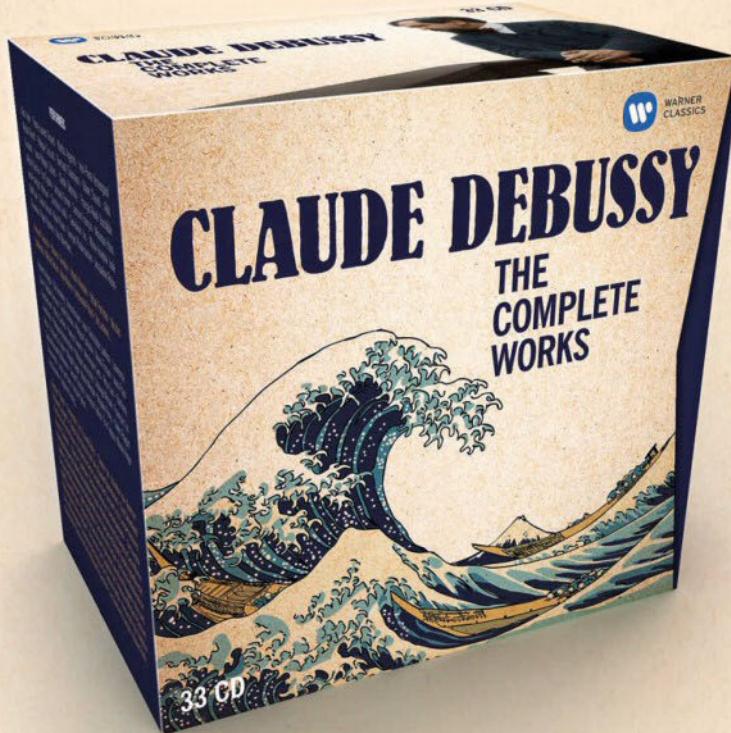
Illustrator Chris Riddell on drawing to music

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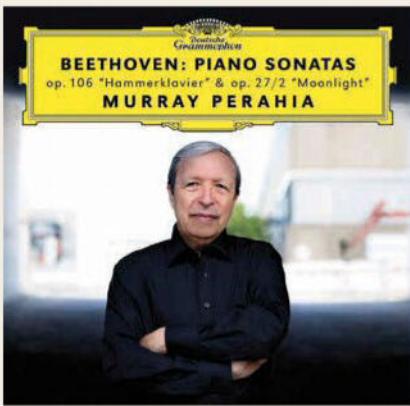
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# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



**BEETHOVEN**  
 'Moonlight' and  
 'Hammerklavier'  
 Sonatas  
**Murray Perahia** *pf*  
 DG  
 ▶ **RICHARD OSBORNE'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 24**

Murray Perahia, one of today's very finest pianists, brings intelligence, grace and virtuosity to these most well-known of sonatas – a superb recording of real drama and beauty.



**'THE GERSHWIN MOMENT'**  
**Kirill Gerstein** *pf* **St Louis Symphony Orchestra / David Robertson**  
 Myrios

Kirill Gerstein's famed virtuosity meets his jazz background to produce a thrilling, hugely enjoyable and well thought-out celebration of Gershwin's music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 29**



**FRANCK** String Quartet.  
 Piano Quintet  
**Paavali Jumppanen** *pf*  
**Danel Quartet**  
 CPO

Critic Andrew Farach-Colton's praise for this Franck chamber set, and for Quatuor Danel's gripping interpretations, couldn't be stronger: 'urgently recommended', he concludes.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



**MARTINŮ** Madrigals  
**Martinů Voices / Lukáš Vasilek**  
 Supraphon  
 Extraordinary, skilful and atmospheric

music, both sacred and secular, from Martinů – words which equally apply to the music-making itself from the ensemble named in his honour.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



**DVD/BLU-RAY**  
**TCHAIKOVSKY** The Queen of Spades  
**Sols; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Mariss Jansons**  
 C Major Entertainment

Tchaikovsky himself becomes a central character in his own opera in this staging from Amsterdam, a 'terrific memento of a provocative but enthralling production', writes reviewer Mark Pullinger.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



**JS BACH** Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, BWV1014-1019  
**Isabelle Faust** *vn* **Kristian Bezuidenhout** *hp*  
 Harmonia Mundi

Isabelle Faust and Kristian Bezuidenhout's experience in performing these works together pays dividends once in front of the mics on this wonderful set.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



**BERSA** Complete Piano Music, Vol 1'  
**Goran Filipec** *pf*  
 Grand Piano  
 New music to me, but what a delight to

discover! This is the opening volume of a series devoted to the Croatian composer Blagoje Bersa's, and one couldn't ask for a better champion than Goran Filipec.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



**SCHNITTKE**  
 Psalms of Repentance  
**Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir / Kaspars Putniņš**  
 BIS

Possibly the best recording yet of one of the choral repertoire's most technically challenging works, says critic Ivan Moody of this powerful Schnittke recording.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



**MAHLER. R STRAUSS**  
 Brigitte Fassbaender *mez*  
 Munich Philharmonic / Sergiu Celibidache  
 Münchner Philharmoniker  
 Deeply moving Mahler from Brigitte Fassbaender makes for a compelling release.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



**FRANCK. POULENC**  
 Cello Sonatas  
**Edgar Moreau** *vc*  
**David Kadouch** *pf*  
 Erato

Well-known favourites and less familiar works are given equally excellent advocacy by the ever-impressive young French cellist Edgar Moreau and pianist David Kadouch.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



**DEBUSSY** 'Songs, Vol 4'  
**Lucy Crowe** *sop*  
**Malcolm Martineau** *pf*  
 Hyperion  
 Debussy features heavily in this issue,

and if you're inspired to explore his music further then this, the latest volume in Hyperion's series of his songs, is an exquisite place to turn.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



**HANDEL** Arias  
**Franco Fagioli** *counterten*  
**Il Pomo d'Oro / Zefira Valova** *vn*  
 DG  
 From theatrical

fireworks to slower arias, countertenor Franco Fagioli brings drama and superb singing to this Handel showcase; Il Pomo d'Oro offer excellent accompaniment.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



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# FOR THE RECORD

## Alisa Weilerstein signs to Pentatone



Cellist Alisa Weilerstein has signed to the Dutch label Pentatone. The first release of this new partnership, due later this year, is a collaboration with the Trondheim Soloists, the Norwegian chamber ensemble with which she is Artistic Partner, in an intriguing pairing of Haydn (both cello concertos) and Schoenberg (*Verklärte Nacht*, where Weilerstein plays as part of the ensemble).

The American cellist's recent recordings were for Decca, and included the Elgar and Elliott Carter concertos with Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin – an Editor's Choice in February 2013 and, like her new disc, another unusual coupling. The following July, her recording of Dvořák's Cello Concerto likewise impressed our critic Andrew Achenbach, who praised Weilerstein's 'flawless technical address, lustrous tone-production and intrepid range of dynamic', while also highlighting the 'captivating candour and risk-taking flair' of her playing.

Weilerstein clearly feels a natural connection with her new label. She commented: 'Pentatone's values are in line with mine. Our conversations about repertoire have demonstrated the depth of their knowledge and, perhaps even more importantly, their eagerness in encouraging me to expand my musical horizons. I feel completely at home.' With this partnership of such an inquisitive and intelligent artist and a supportive and exploratory label, we look forward to the artistic results.

## Stephen Cleobury to retire from King's after 37 years

Stephen Cleobury will step down as Director of Music of King's College, Cambridge in September 2019. Such has been the length of his tenure that it's the first time the college has sought someone to fill the post since 1982.

In the intervening 37 years – as it will be by the time he retires – Cleobury has retained and built on the choir's position as one of the pre-eminent, and arguably the most famous, of its type in the world. As well as singing at the daily services in the chapel, the choir tours and records extensively. Having released 100 albums on mainly EMI and Decca, many of which were made during Cleobury's tenure, the college launched its own label in 2012. Its first five years have offered a superb insight into the choir's breadth of repertoire, and even included a purely instrumental recording by Cleobury on King's renowned organ. The choir's highest profile annual event is its Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, broadcast worldwide to millions each Christmas, and one of Cleobury's most significant contributions both to the King's repertoire and to the wider choral world was the introduction, in 1983, of a specially commissioned carol every year by a leading composer of the day to the service.



## Christa Ludwig turns 90 and her labels celebrate in style

The great German mezzo Christa Ludwig turns 90 on March 16 and two of her frequent recording labels are celebrating by releasing special sets. From Deutsche Grammophon comes a collection that embraces opera, oratorio and Lieder, and captures some of her great musical collaborations with conductors like Böhm, Karajan, Solti and Bernstein. Opera excerpts come from Mozart and Beethoven via Wagner, Strauss and Puccini to Pizzetti and Bernstein (as the Old Lady in his London-made set of *Candide* – incidentally, just reissued on LP). Lieder recitals feature pianists Erik Werba, James Levine (*Winterreise*) and Irwin Gage.

Warner Classics has dipped into its catalogue but focuses on Ludwig the Lieder singer (with pianists like Gerald Moore and Geoffrey Parsons, and – borrowed from Sony Classical – a Brahms collection for which she was partnered by Leonard Bernstein). The set also includes the celebrated Klemperer-conducted Mahler *Das Lied von der Erde* with Fritz Wunderlich and Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder*.



PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL STUART/DECCA, KEVIN LEIGHTON/KING'S COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

# New posts for Alsop and Shani



Marin Alsop gets a new post in Vienna

**M**arin Alsop has been named Chief Conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra from September 2019.

Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra since 2007 and Principal Conductor and Music Director of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra since 2012 (a post she steps down from in 2019), Alsop is also a former *Gramophone* Artist of the Year.

'I am very excited about the prospect of collaborating with Vienna RSO,' said Alsop. 'We share the same enthusiasm

for expanding the repertoire and for connecting with new audiences.' She also added that she was 'deeply moved by the fact that the players instigated my appointment'.

Founded in 1969, the orchestra boasts a discography including works by Friedrich Cerha and all nine symphonies by Egon Wellesz, as well as more mainstream works by Bruckner, Richard Strauss and Bartók.

Also this month, Lahav Shani – the young conductor taking over at the Rotterdam Philharmonic later this year – has been named as the new Music Director of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. His appointment will begin with the 2020/21 season, though from the season prior to that he will hold the title Music Director Designate.

The Tel Aviv-born 29-year-old former winner of the Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition will become only the second person to hold the post, succeeding Zubin Mehta, who was appointed to the position in 1969. Shani's first performance with the IPO was, in fact, as a pianist, aged 16.

## ONE TO WATCH

### Owain Park Composer and conductor

When *Gramophone*'s Editor visited Trinity College, Cambridge a couple of years ago to interview its music director Stephen Layton, nestling among that day's Evensong music of Purcell, Guerrero and former music director Richard Marlow was a setting of The Lord's Prayer by Owain Park. That wasn't his first mention in our pages – a few months earlier David Thrasher had described his new version of *Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day* as a highlight of Trinity's 2015 Christmas offering *Yulefest!*. The young composer was then the college's organ scholar, and in that capacity he also appeared as organist on Trinity's Editor's Choice recording of Stanford (07/17) and their Editor's Choice and Awards-nominated Howells disc (04/16).

But it's as both composer and conductor that he's becoming best known. His music is published by Novello; one work, *Upheld by*



*Stillness*, was included on the debut disc of the Ora choir, prompting our critic to describe Park as 'weaving a work of flickering movement and unshowy invention', while other choirs to have performed his music include Tenebrae, the Tallis Scholars, the Aurora Orchestra, the Norwegian Soloists' Choir and the choir of Wells Cathedral (where Park was a chorister). Hyperion will release an album of his music later this year.

As for conductor, Park directs the choirs The Gesualdo Six and Cambridge Chorale. Next month sees the release of the debut disc from the first of those groups (also on Hyperion), featuring English Renaissance music by Tallis, Byrd, Sheppard, Dunstable and Cornish. In whichever capacity you encounter him, Owain Park is a rising star of the choral music world well worth keeping an ear out for.

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### Podcasts

This month's podcasts take us into Westminster Abbey and the 16th century, where conductor James O'Donnell talks about the choir's new recording of Ludford's music; we then step into the 18th century with soprano Ruby Hughes and conductor Laurence Cummings, whose new album celebrates singer and Handel muse Giulia Frasi; finally, it's the 19th and 20th centuries,



Ruby Hughes celebrates Handel's muse

as conductor Andris Nelsons discusses his new recordings of Bruckner and Shostakovich with his Leipzig and Boston orchestras. Find the podcasts at our website, or in your podcast app of choice.

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# IN THE STUDIO

Swiss pianist **Andreas Haefliger** has recorded his debut album for BIS, set for release on April 27. Following his acclaimed 'Perspectives' recital of Berg, Liszt, Beethoven and Mussorgsky at the Edinburgh Festival, he recorded the same programme in the Mozart-Saal of Vienna's Konzerthaus. Bass-baritone **Thomas Quasthoff** has made his first solo album since 2010, to be released in May on Sony Classical. Quasthoff had retired in 2012 following the death of his brother, to whom he has chosen to dedicate this new album of jazz classics. Violinist **Kyung Wha Chung** is recording Brahms's Concerto in Rome

with Pappano and his Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. The work is being recorded over three concerts in February, for release on Warner Classics. The **Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea** were at Temple Church in January recording Ireland and Elgar, and arrangements of Fauré and Holst, for a forthcoming Remembrance disc for SOMM. They were joined by Chelsea Pensioners for three hymns including *Jerusalem*. Korean pianist **Yeol Eum** was involved in Sir Neville Marriner's last recording – Mozart's Piano Concerto No 21 with ASMF. The recording is finally to be released in April on Onyx.

## STUDIO FOCUS *Roxanna Panufnik*

The British composer on recording 'Celestial Bird', a 50th-birthday CD on Signum due out in September

### This recording could be seen as something of a birthday present ...

I turn 50 in April and I wanted to find different ways to celebrate it. I seem to be mostly known for my religious choral music and I felt it was time that people saw my secular and more romantic side. This recording includes some very romantic pieces, and also the Indian music collaboration *Unending Love* which represents my passion for world music.

### The January sessions were at Birmingham University's Bramall Music Building ...

So much of my music has been recorded in churches, which is lovely because a church acoustic lends itself really well to my sacred music. But because this CD includes a lot of secular repertoire, I wanted a different feel.

### You collaborated with Ex Cathedra and Milapfest on the recording ...

Ex Cathedra commissioned two of the works, *Since We Parted* and *Child of Heaven*. And Indian musicians from Milapfest had already been involved in last year's premiere of *Unending Love*. The loveliest thing was to see everyone come together in the session. Until then, they'd only rehearsed separately – but they gelled beautifully, and there was this



Rapport: Panufnik and producer Adrian Peacock

fantastic energy and focus. It was a very formative experience for both ensembles. I know that Ex Cathedra's conductor Jeffrey Skidmore had always wanted to do this kind of collaboration.

### Tell us more about the Indian musicians ...

The Carnatic singer Ashnaa Sasikaran is only 17 but she has this amazing voice that sounds like she has lived several lifetimes. She loved the recording experience and is longing to do more. And I had an amazing animateur, Shiv Pattni, who liaised between them and Jeffrey. He was also responsible for converting my Westernised notation into Sargam, the North Indian notation system.

### Your son Benedict Macklow-Smith sang St Aidan's Prayer ...

Ben is a chorister at Westminster Abbey and he loves it. He's definitely got the Panufnik gene coursing through him! I was hugely proud of him. He came up on the train and was suddenly launched into this session with 10 professional singers and Jeffrey, who he'd never met – and he just did it. The producer, Adrian Peacock, asked him to breathe in a different place and he was unfazed!

### Your husband was involved too ...

I was lucky that both the Arts Council and PRS (The Composers' Fund) supported this project, as did some private backers – one of whom was my husband! He bought the track *Unending Love* as a wedding anniversary present, which was very romantic of him.

### You've worked with Signum before ...

I've done several projects with Signum and they just seem to get what I'm doing, musically. And this is my third project with Adrian as producer – he seems to know my pieces better than I do! He's always so well prepared and has lovely suggestions when it comes to interpretation. He was a fantastic asset to the whole recording. I'm dying for him to send me the edits now!

## Erato adds new countertenor to roster

**E**rato has signed up countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński. The 27-year-old Polish-born singer's debut disc on the label (on whose artist roster he now joins star countertenor Philippe Jaroussky) will be a recital of 17th-century sacred arias, recorded with Il Pomo d'oro and conductor Maxim Emelyanychev.

It's this area of the repertoire in which he's currently making his mark; this season includes the title role in Handel's *Rinaldo* at Oper

Frankfurt, and the role of Orimeno in Cavalli's *Erismena* with Festival d'Aix-en-Provence on tour. Orliński also excels in a completely different area – he trained as a professional break-dancer.

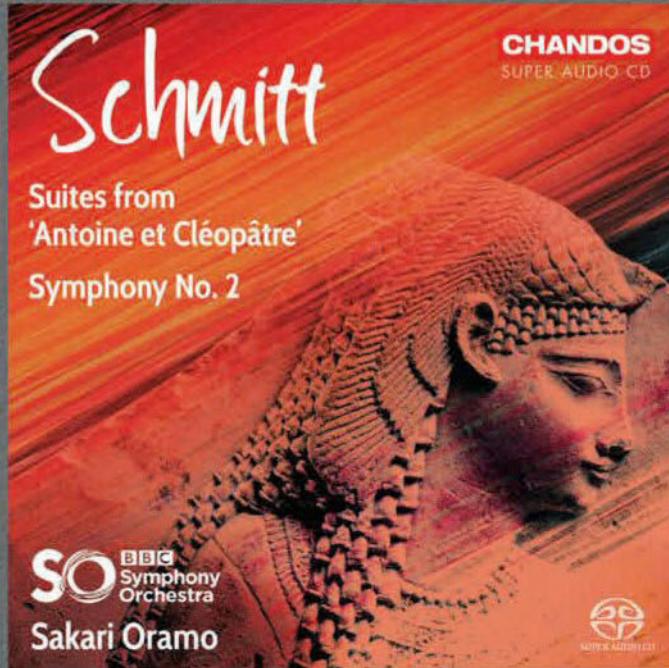
'One of the most exciting aspects of this profession is to be able to bet on young artists starting out in their careers with the conviction that they will become tomorrow's star,' said Alain Lanceron, President of Erato and someone whose bets have regularly paid off.



PHOTOGRAPH: JIYANG CHEN

# MARCH RELEASES

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# ARTISTS & THEIR INSTRUMENTS

## *Kirill Gerstein on his rare 1930s Bechstein double-keyboard piano*

“I've always been fascinated by anything connected to Busoni, and when I was a student in New York I discovered some recordings in the library by Gunnar Johansen, who had been taught by Egon Petri, who had been taught by Busoni. They were of Bach-Busoni transcriptions played on a double-keyboard Steinway piano. I was fascinated by this instrument, but for years I didn't find out anything more.

Then in about 2007 I was in Australia and I went to the Canberra School of Music to see Larry Sitsky, who has written an important book about Busoni's piano music. I was talking to him when I suddenly saw a photo of him in front of a double-keyboard Bechstein piano. I asked him about it and he said, 'It's right here in the basement.' 'I have to go and see it,' I replied.

The piano had been brought from Germany by Larry's teacher Winifred Burston, who, as it happened, had also studied with Busoni. I saw this thing, played it and thought to myself, 'Well, I'm not going to be able to sleep until I find one'. But there was a problem. Only 64 double-keyboard pianos - built to a design by the Hungarian composer-turned-inventor Emánuel Moór - had ever been made, of which Bechstein produced just 16. So there weren't many candidates.

I started looking online - I have a talent for Googling. After a while, I came upon some pictures of what I was looking for on an online discussion board. An amateur piano tuner in Florida had written alongside them: 'I have this strange beast of a piano, and I'm looking forward to taking it apart to see how it works.' Which alarmed me a little.

I found his email address and sent him a message out of the blue: 'How's that piano? Is it still in one piece?' It turns out it was still on its side in his garage. He hadn't gotten around to doing much to it, which was nice because it meant that I didn't have to deal with the results of some drastic operation. I begged him to sell it to me.



I subsequently discovered more of the instrument's history. According to Bechstein's records, it was sold in Berlin in 1931 to someone in Nuremberg. Then, at the end of World War Two, it was taken out of the country by the Red Army. This particular piano went to Georgia where it stood in someone's private house - a smoker, it would appear, from the condition of the piano. It was sold on eBay as part of an estate sale, at which point the piano tuner acquired it and it sailed from Georgia to Florida.

When I bought it, we flew it from Florida to Germany where a very dear friend of mine in Freiburg restored it. We were able to keep the original hammers, which are very beautiful. But the action blocks for three of the keys were missing and nobody was willing to take on such a customised job of supplying replacements. Finally, I found two gentlemen in a small village in England who were specialists in making custom-made parts for historical pianos, and they agreed to help. I showed what they'd done to my piano restorer and he said he couldn't have done it any better!

The piano now lives in my apartment in Berlin and I'm so grateful to have it. It really comes alive in transcriptions of Bach because you can luxuriate in these organ-like sonorities that can only be achieved by having two keyboards. The upper keyboard is an octave higher than the lower one, so you can play chords that span two octaves with just one hand. It's like playing three-dimensional chess - you don't just have to go left or right! Another exciting feature is the middle pedal which, when you press it, couples the lower keyboard to the upper one.

This piano is my hobby, it's for my amusement. But I also find it very informative. I'm able to find qualities that stay in my hands when I return to my Steinway, enriching my playing beyond measure.”

*Read our review of Kirill Gerstein's Gershwin recording on page 29*

## BBC's biggest classical season

The BBC has unveiled plans for what it describes as 'the biggest-ever classical music season across the BBC'. Called 'Our Classical Century', it will explore the past 100 years of classical performance, through programmes on Radio 3 and BBC Four, and concerts by BBC orchestras (including at the Proms). Meanwhile, on March 8 - International Women's Day - Radio 3 will broadcast a concert featuring five works by forgotten female composers

## Latecomers will no longer miss out

Latecomers to London's Royal Albert Hall will now be able to hear what they're missing in high-quality sound while they wait to be let in. French high-end audio company Devialet is installing an 'immersive experiential space' inside Door 6 main entrance, as part of a partnership with the venue.

## Sony signs new guitarist

Sony Classical has added a new guitarist to its artist roster, Pablo Sáinz-Villegas, whose first release on the label will be a song album with tenor Plácido Domingo. In joining Sony, the Spanish-born, New York-based guitarist joins the stable which released the bulk of recordings by acclaimed guitarists John Williams and - on Sony-owned RCA - Julian Bream.

## BBT names this year's recipients

The Borletti-Buitoni Trust, which has offered early-career support to many of today's stars, has announced its 2018 recipients: Dudok Kwartet Amsterdam and clarinettist Annelien Van Wauwe get £30,000 Awards, and £20,000 Fellowships go to the Castalian String Quartet, cellist Alessio Pianelli, viola player Diyang Mei, violinist Tessa Lark and our One to Watch last month, Trio Isimsiz.

# FROM WHERE I SIT

## What makes a modern composer a popular and widely performed success, asks Edward Seckerson



Last year I attended the UK Premiere of Anders Hillborg's Violin Concerto No 2 performed by its spellbinding dedicatee – the extraordinary Lisa Batiashvili – and the BBC Symphony Orchestra under its Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo. I was both gripped and seduced by a piece in which narrative and emotional imperative took precedent over colour and texture – or rather dictated the vertical, the textural, aspects of the piece. One was drawn in by a strong sense of the linear, the extent to which the protagonist – the solo violin – took us on a journey, sometimes breathless and anxious and hyperactive, sometimes meditative, but always with direction and purpose. Not for nothing did the solo part begin with an echo of Bach's Sarabande in D major. A recognisable blast from the past, a helpful pointer to the future, a tonal anchor.

Having heard and enjoyed the piece – and I was much impressed by it – I read in the programme that Hillborg is now the most widely performed of all contemporary composers. A startling but not entirely surprising fact given how quickly the word on him has spread and how distinguished performers are lining up to commission him – among them Yo-Yo Ma and Renée Fleming, who commissioned and performed the gorgeous *The Strand Settings* in 2016. The Second Violin Concerto commission involved four orchestras, guaranteeing at least four and probably more performances. So what is it about Hillborg that has so quickly and dramatically built his following? Can it be something as simple as 'accessibility' – a nasty word in some more radical quarters – or his ability to embrace the horizontal in music and spin long melodic 'lines' when for so long the trend has moved further and further towards the vertical? It's hard to say. But storytelling and a clear sense of where we the listeners are in the narrative play a part.

Detractors might say that the likes of Hillborg are reactionary, a throwback to the music of the past; a safe, soft option from those striving to push the envelope. Such criticisms have certainly been directed at Jake Heggie – another success story – whose operas I have been reviewing in these pages and whose clear acknowledgment of his American music theatre heritage and open-hearted lyric writing is winning new audiences everywhere.

Heggie may well be the most performed contemporary opera composer of the present time and the late arrival of his international success – *Dead Man Walking* – will sell out at the Barbican, not least for the presence of Joyce DiDonato whose enthusiastic advocacy of Heggie has more than a little to do with the grateful way he writes for the voice. So why do the contemporary music snobs brand him as regressive or worse still lightweight? Leonard Bernstein had the self same problem (as I reflected in the December issue) but after much soul-searching realised that the answer lay in simply being himself.

Bottom line: there's room for all approaches, all styles, all brands of newness. Some may indeed prefer to draw upon the past, maybe even relive it. But don't knock them for doing so. **G**

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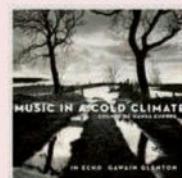
**Dreams & Fancies: English music for solo guitar**  
**Walton – Berkeley – Dowland – Arnold - Britten**  
Sean Shibe

'Most of [the works here] were inspired by Julian Bream's superlative artistry ... Under Shibe's fingers, they are all mesmerising' — Gramophone, September 2017, EDITOR'S CHOICE

'superb artistry ... Shibe gathers the listener into [Britten's] unsettling, fantastical soundworld with an intensity that combines gracefulness and threat with rapier skill' — BBC Music Magazine, October 2017, INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

## MUSIC MAGAZINE AWARDS 2018

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In Echo / Gawain Glenton

New Delphian signing In Echo is made up of some of Europe's finest young early-music specialists. Each a soloist in their own right, under director Gawain Glenton they have put together a fascinating snapshot of the musical landscape during the heyday of the Hanseatic League: from London to Tallinn via Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen and the ports of Holland, Denmark and Sweden. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century composer-musicians on this recording each looked beyond their own shores and toward a sense of shared European culture and understanding.

'fascinating ... The fashionable melancholy of the day is offset by cheerful folk themes and dances'  
— The Observer, February 2018



DCD34177 (two discs)

### Medtner: Songs

Ekaterina Siurina, Justina Gringyte, Robin Tritschler, Rodion Pogossov, Oleksiy Palchykov, Nikolay Didenko, Iain Burnside

Following the rapturous reception given to his complete *Rachmaninov: Songs* on Delphian, pianist Iain Burnside set out to bring together six regular collaborators in a survey of songs by Nikolai Medtner. More than any other genre, Medtner's songs exemplify his dual German/Russian heritage, manifest in his devotion to both Goethe and Pushkin. Musically, too, there are paradoxes, with the self-proclaimed defiant conservative's work shot through with moments of striking modernity. Pianistically, he was a giant – the writing makes Herculean demands of the player – yet he is often most eloquent when simplest. From an output of over 100 songs, Burnside has selected just over fifty, carefully matching them to his chosen singers to reveal a compositional voice that is itself unique.

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CLAUDE DEBUSSY

LA MER



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# Impressions of DEBUSSY

His use of colour influenced composers from Stravinsky to Boulez, but to call him an Impressionist misses the point finds Mark Pullinger, as he talks to musicians a century after the composer's death

**B**rowse for Debussy on disc and you'll often be faced with two types of cover art: Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* or paintings by Claude Monet and any number of Impressionist or neo-Impressionist artists. At least the Hokusai is pertinent; Debussy had stipulated that the woodblock print appear on the cover page to the score of *La mer* (see left). Warner Classics employs it on the box of its whopping 33-disc set of the complete works, recently released to mark the centenary of his death. Indeed, the cardboard sleeve of each disc features Japanese art, barring the last disc of recordings which has Debussy himself at the piano.

The composer would perhaps be less happy about the Monet, Seurat and Signac cover images which often bind his music to that of the Impressionists, although it was the term itself to which he objected. In a letter to his publisher about his orchestral

*Images*, Debussy wrote: 'I am trying to do "something different" ... what the imbeciles call "impressionism", a term which is as poorly used as possible, particularly by art critics who never cease lumbering Turner with it!' Impressionism was a term coined in a satirical sense in an 1874 review by Louis Leroy in *Le Charivari*, drawing its name from Monet's early *Impression, Sunrise*. Did Debussy protest too much? How far can his music be described as Impressionist? What qualities of his music are most admired today? And, a century on from his death, what is Debussy's legacy? I requested the views of some leading performers and composers to help seek some clarity.

## THE IMPRESSIONIST TAG

Composer Colin Matthews, who has orchestrated both books of *Préludes*, points out that the Impressionist painters were none too happy themselves with Leroy's tag. 'When we published



Seated portrait of Claude Debussy (1862-1918) dating from c1904

the scores, I very deliberately used a painting by Whistler because I didn't immediately want to draw that parallel!' Fellow composer Robin Holloway describes the Impressionist tag as a 'red herring', explaining that 'Debussy tries to evoke, by metaphor and symbol and by sonorous image, a cloud or a seascape or a sultry Spanish night. He's not doing an impression. He thought that was cheap.'

In a Parisian café, pianist Philippe Cassard shows me a lavishly illustrated hardback volume entitled *Harmonie en bleu et en or: Debussy, la musique et les arts* by Jean-Michel Nectoux, a catalogue of every kind of object – paintings, books, poetry and music – that Debussy encountered or collected. 'The proof is there!' Cassard exclaims. 'He saw some of Monet's *Waterlilies* and he didn't like them. But when you see the Rouen Cathedral series or the *Nymphéas*, connections do

have to be made by an interpreter because Monet and Debussy had the same vision of the world. What is colour? How do you translate it into music? How do you depict nature or weather in art? Debussy questions these things in his music, but it's not the reason to call him Impressionist. That just reduces the greatness of Debussy.'

Yet, conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla is quick to point out that Debussy was 'an exceptional painter in music, striving to find the combination of colour, form and line for every poetic idea he was trying to express.' She continues: 'The Impressionist tag must have felt too narrow for him; he was searching for something more global. I think one of his goals was not to stick to any rules or to any school or one style of musical language, but to search for beauty.'

If anything, Cassard feels that Debussy was far closer to the Symbolists than the Impressionists. 'Look at the connections:



'Faune': Bakst's ballet design; opening flute solo, signed by Debussy; Mallarmé's poem

his relationships with Stéphane Mallarmé [from his musical depiction of the poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*] and Maurice Maeterlinck [*Pelléas et Mélisande*]; *Nocturnes* is inspired by Whistler's paintings of the same title; and there there's Charles Baudelaire – who was at the origins of the Symbolist movement – and whose poetry Debussy set. Baudelaire was also the translator of Edgar Allan Poe, and Debussy knew every text.' Other influences include Debussy's affinity with the English Pre-Raphaelites, manifested principally in his cantata *La Damoiselle élue*, which is based on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem *The Blessed Damozel*.

#### ‘USEFUL TERMS OF ABUSE’

In a letter of 1911 to Edgard Varèse, Debussy confessed: 'I love pictures almost as much as music.' And towards the end of his life, he wrote to Émile Vuillermoz, the editor of *La Revue musicale* thus: 'You do me a great honour by calling me a pupil of Claude Monet.' Many of his titles *are* distinctly pictorial – 'La soirée dans Grenade', 'Reflets dans l'eau', 'La cathédrale engloutie' – almost inviting us to see with our ears. Debussy's writing, though, rarely has the blurs and smudges of Monet. A glance at the composer's neat manuscript scores and you'll see precision in every bar, teeming with fastidious detail and myriad dynamic markings.

'Anyone dislikes being pigeon-holed. He might have disliked the label "Impressionist" because it took away from the precision,' suggests Stephen Hough. 'Impressionism suggests something imprecise in the way it's been used. Look at late Monet paintings with their washes of colour. I don't think Debussy was about a wash, he was about a lot of detail.'

Impressionism? Symbolism? In a 1901 journal entry Debussy admits that these were 'useful terms of abuse'. Hough concedes that labels can be useful and that 'it doesn't feel totally wrong to talk of Debussy as an Impressionist and to link him with all of those painters – and I don't just mean Monet, but Manet too and the later Fauve painters.' He elaborates: 'The innocent childlike figures that you see in *Children's Corner* – now, that is a piece that could never be called Impressionist, but to me it's certainly linked to that world of French painting.' I remark that in the two books of *Préludes*, Debussy doesn't reveal the title until the end of each miniature. 'Which is lovely,' he replies. 'It's like a perfume lingering after someone's walked past. There's a deliberate ambiguity in this music. Debussy asks the



questions and just leaves them hanging in the air.'

#### AWAKENING THE FAUN

Pierre Boulez cited Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* as a major turning point, the birth of modern music. In his words, 'the flute of the faun brought new breath to the art of music; what was overthrown was not so much the art of development, as the very concept of form itself'. Matthews believes that Boulez 'was certainly thinking in terms of the harmonies and the way that the music floats, but a lot of that is due to the colour which was remarkably individual and new.'

I've long loved *Faune*, both as an orchestral piece and the ballet choreographed to it by Nijinsky. It conjures up images of the faun playing his panpipes, in amorous pursuit of nymphs and naiads in the sultry afternoon heat. Mallarmé was initially irked that his poem was to be set to music, but was completely won round by the first performance, writing to the composer: 'Your illustration of *The Afternoon of a Faun*, which presents a dissonance with my text only by going much further, really, into nostalgia and into light, with finesse, with sensuality, with richness. I press your hand admiringly, Debussy.'

The score is a free rather than literal illustration of Mallarmé's poem. Debussy evokes an atmosphere through motifs, distinctive harmonies, exotic scales (whole-tone and pentatonic), chromatic coils and unresolved chords. *Tremolando* strings provide a shimmering heat-haze for the faun's erotic adventures. As Colin Matthews says, the music indeed floats; it seems to lack a pulse, and its improvisational quality is evident right from the opening flute solo, sighing languidly through the range of a tritone.

That flute solo must be, I suggest to flautist Emmanuel Pahud, one of the most daunting in the orchestral repertoire, along with the bassoon solo that opens Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. 'You wish it would be over!' he laughs. 'When you



have such a beautiful phrase in an orchestral context, where everybody in the hall – including the conductor and other musicians – are all dependent on how you're going to play it, that puts you under a lot of pressure. Often conductors do not even look at the flautist in order not to be misinterpreted, they just give us a slight sign when they're ready for me to begin. This is not enough; the conductor has to give a tempo, to give an upbeat, to give a breath.'

Pahud concurs that Debussy is a gift to flautists. '*Faune* allows us to explore the dynamics as softly as possible and this is something recurrent in Debussy's music. He very often leaves one or two flutes on their own in order to test how far you can go into the diminuendo or into the silence and it's that transition which is intriguing and amazingly intense.'

#### COLOUR, EROTICISM ... AND RAVEL

*Faune* seemed to come out of nowhere and Debussy continued to surprise. Gražintė-Tyla comments that each work possesses a unique quality. 'After his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* came *La mer* and everyone was expecting a similar sound world but it was completely different in style. Then he wrote *Images* and again it was completely different. He had this incredible creativity, never repeating himself.'

*'L'isle joyeuse is not only the island; it's the celebration of a woman's body, it's Debussy's own celebration as a lover'* – Philippe Cassard

With *Syrinx* for solo flute and the late Sonata for flute, viola and harp, Debussy returned to the perfumed atmosphere of *Faune*. Pahud, who has recently recorded both, loves the intimacy of the sonata, but admits that performing it in recital presents its own problems. 'A lot happens between the notes, between the parts, so the rehearsal process is often very intense and rewarding, but having the audience there I often feel trapped, as if they are intruders. The piece transports you to Ancient Greece, somewhere very warm and lazy, and therefore you don't want modern life to intrude.'

Right from *Faune*, eroticism featured strongly in Debussy's palette. Cassard adores *L'isle joyeuse*, calling it 'the most sexual piece for the piano!' In his view, it relates to certain events in the composer's life: 'Debussy met Emma Bardac and took her to Jersey and they spent eight days together. *L'isle joyeuse* is not only the island; it is Emma, the celebration of a woman's body, and Debussy's own celebration as a lover. There are three ecstasies in this piece – multiple orgasms – and it is one of his rare purely joyful pieces, without any trace of sadness or nostalgia.'

Colour also frequently comes up in my conversations, be that orchestral or instrumental. 'Debussy was so original in the way he laid out textures and composed upon textures,' remarks Holloway. "'Jeux de vagues" is conceived on the orchestra. You can imagine the other movements of *La mer* being composed at the piano and then orchestrated, but "Jeux de vagues" – and the ballet *Jeux* – are absolutely conceived on their instrumentation.'

'*Pagodes*', muses Hough, 'is just like he found a new colour that hadn't been found before, like Yves Klein finding his International Blue. Those opening chords give me a shiver every time I hear them.' For him there are two factors which combine to make Debussy a great composer: 'One is this sense of improvisation. You can imagine him sitting down at the piano and just enjoying the wonderful sounds and vibrations



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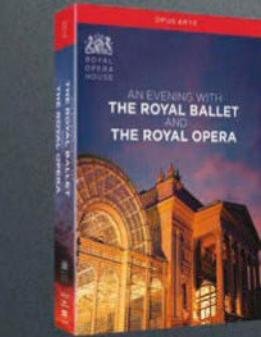
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he was creating as his fingers moved in these new directions on the keys; but then there is this incredible intellectual rigour in his music. It's not just doodling around with pretty sounds. Everything is structured and so refined and specific.'

Look for Debussy on disc and – as well as the Impressionist covers – you'll often find him jostling shoulders with Ravel, something that puzzles many of my interviewees. The clockwork precision of Ravel is a far cry from the improvisational quality of Debussy. 'Ravel is a fantastic machine

which cannot go wrong if you obey the instructions,' comments Holloway. 'Debussy, on the contrary, is very difficult to interpret, because you have to keep adjusting the dynamics. All conductors would say the same: Ravel you obey, Debussy you have to interpret.'

#### THE CHALLENGES OF ORCHESTRATING DEBUSSY

With such a wealth of music for piano it is inevitable that composers feed their fascination with Debussy by clothing it in orchestral garb. This comes with dangers, particularly to what Hough describes as the improvisatory quality of Debussy's piano scores. 'Eighty people cannot spontaneously improvise. It has to be decided beforehand.

And one of the important elements of Debussy's music to me is this sense that you sit down at the piano and it's as if you are making it up as each second goes past.

An orchestration is in some way frozen, however imaginatively it is done. With these miniatures, there is a certain magic which isn't lost, but is certainly diluted a little bit.'

How does a composer, then, approach orchestrating Debussy? Colin Matthews confides: 'I made it a rule not to look at a single one of his orchestral scores during the process of orchestrating the *Préludes*. Obviously it was not going to sound like me, but I wanted to put my own personal stamp on it with certain changes that needed to be made to make it fit better in terms of key.' Matthews had long been fascinated with the *Préludes*. 'Many years ago I used to play the ones that I could get my hands around and I always thought about the orchestral colours. I found, quite to my surprise, that in some scores I had previously marked in pencil a possible instrumentation!'

In his transcriptions, Robin Holloway also took orchestral clues from the piano scores, without being slavish. For *C'est l'extase*, his settings of 10 Debussy songs based on Paul Verlaine texts, he reordered the songs, linking them together as continuous music and composing an epilogue ('the score is my working original. I stick to the notes, but take up hints and suggestions from it.'). When orchestrating *En blanc et noir*, Holloway had to extend the Debussian palette: 'It's a



Debussy in 1905 with second wife Emma Bardac, whose femininity influenced *L'île joyeuse*

work that was bursting the two-piano medium. It sounds very orchestral but like no orchestral music that Debussy ever wrote. For those first two movements, there was no Debussy prototype, so I had to invent a new orchestral sonority that he'd never written before. It's so hard-edged and full-blooded, in your face and charged up by the wartime context. It is his most modern music.'

#### DEBUSSY'S LEGACY

To mark the centenary, Gražinytė-Tyla has programmed a fascinating series with the City of Birmingham Symphony

Orchestra in which Debussy's works are juxtaposed with the composers who were influenced by him. The exotic – especially his incorporation of Javanese Gamelan – leads to 'Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes' from Ravel's *Mother Goose* and the suite from Britten's ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas*. She pairs 'sacred' Debussy – *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* – with works by Messiaen; and precedes *La mer* with *Ringed by the Flat Horizon* by George Benjamin, whom the Lithuanian conductor dubs 'the grandchild of Debussy'. Pahud, meanwhile, believes Debussy's legacy extends to composers such as Varèse and Toru Takemitsu (whose classic work *Green*, incidentally, features in the CBSO's series) as well as

to contemporary composers Philippe Hersant and Christian Rivet.

'Stravinsky said that he and most of the composers of his generation owed the most to Debussy',

says Holloway, 'and he meant himself, Bartók, Falla – every composer who wasn't German or Austrian! Debussy was a huge liberator, an emancipator for consonance, an emancipator of the triad. Schoenberg emancipated dissonance, Debussy emancipated consonance.'

Hough believes that Debussy's legacy reaches to the world of jazz, suggesting that 'Reflets dans l'eau' can be heard in the harmonies of Bill Evans. Cassard also cites Evans, who had a classical education. In Evans's extensive solo number *In Memory of his Father*, Cassard hears hidden quotes by Satie, Debussy and Chopin. He also hears the rhythm of *Footsteps in the Snow* imitated in Bartók's Improvisation on Hungarian Peasant Songs No 3.

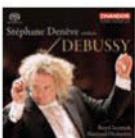
But what of the great French composers of the latter half of the 20th century, Messiaen, Dutilleux and Boulez himself? 'Messiaen for me is more related to Ravel,' says Cassard. 'The long slow section in 'Le gibet' in *Gaspard de la nuit*? It's totally Messiaen. If there is a connection between Debussy and Messiaen, then *L'île joyeuse* and the love section in Act 4 of *Pelléas* lead to 'Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus', which is probably the most neo-romantic of the *Vingt regards*. I asked Dutilleux many times about Debussy's influence on him and, yes, he

loved his music but for him, Berlioz, Ravel and Chopin were his major influences.' Cassard also hears Debussy's influence in Boulez's First Piano Sonata 'but also, strangely, in some of his last pieces *Sur Incises* and *Dialogue de l'ombre double* for clarinet and recorded clarinet. They come after 30 years of dry, disastrous ideological music. Suddenly, the old Boulez returned to this magical sound, curved and not angular.'

Hough concludes: 'I think Debussy opened up certain ideas that the piano can be colour alone. One mustn't take away from Liszt who discovered these colours in a tentative kind of way, but nothing could ever be the same after Debussy.' **G**

## FAVOURITE DEBUSSY RECORDINGS

We ask each of our interviewees to name the Debussy recording they wouldn't be without and to explain why



**Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla** *La mer*  
RSNO / Stéphane Denève  
Chandos (8/12)

'A wonderful collection including *La mer*, *Images* and the *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*. Denève and the RSNO go for very great precision, very detailed realisations of the scores, but at the same time they achieve this incredible sense of freedom.'



**Emmanuel Pahud** *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*.  
Pelléas et Mélisande Suite. Nocturnes  
BPO / Claudio Abbado DG (4/03)

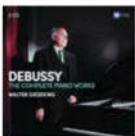
'I experienced the most wonderful music-making in the recording of this disc. Along with the recent performances of *Pelléas* under the direction of Peter Sellars, these are Debussy moments worth remembering.'



**Colin Matthews** *Jeux*  
Hallé / Mark Elder Hallé (6/09)  
'I'm endlessly surprised by *Jeux* - it has such fluidity. This is a remarkable performance, miles away from Boulez, but the way Elder builds it up, with slower tempi than most, means it gains an extraordinary intensity.'



**Robin Holloway** *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.  
LSO / Pierre Monteux  
Decca Eloquence (6/62)  
'I was brought up with Ansermet on Decca, but they haven't always worn very well. I adore Pierre Monteux, who premiered works like *Jeux* and the ballet version of *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*. He's another "golden oldie" but his LSO recordings are very full-blooded, unlike Ansermet who is a bit anaemic.'



**Stephen Hough** *Préludes Book 1*  
Walter Gieseking pf Warner Classics (1/54)  
'This was one of the first recordings that woke me up to colours and ideas. It's slightly sketchy in places - there are notes left out and there are wrong notes but I think he really does capture the sense of improvisation and this kind of "music on the wing".'



**Philippe Cassard** *L'île joyeuse*  
Sviatoslav Richter pf Sony Classical  
Vladimir Horowitz pf Sony Classical (11/69)  
'In completely different ways, Horowitz and Richter express the creativity of great Debussy interpreters, the fantasy, the sense of drive, a fanatic precision. I turned pages for Richter many times and his was the most depressing, the most tragic *L'île joyeuse* I have heard in my life - the final pages are like a satanic bacchanale. It gave me an image of how Richter imagined love or passion - so black, but so interesting! On the other hand, Horowitz's performance is pure joy and ecstasy.'

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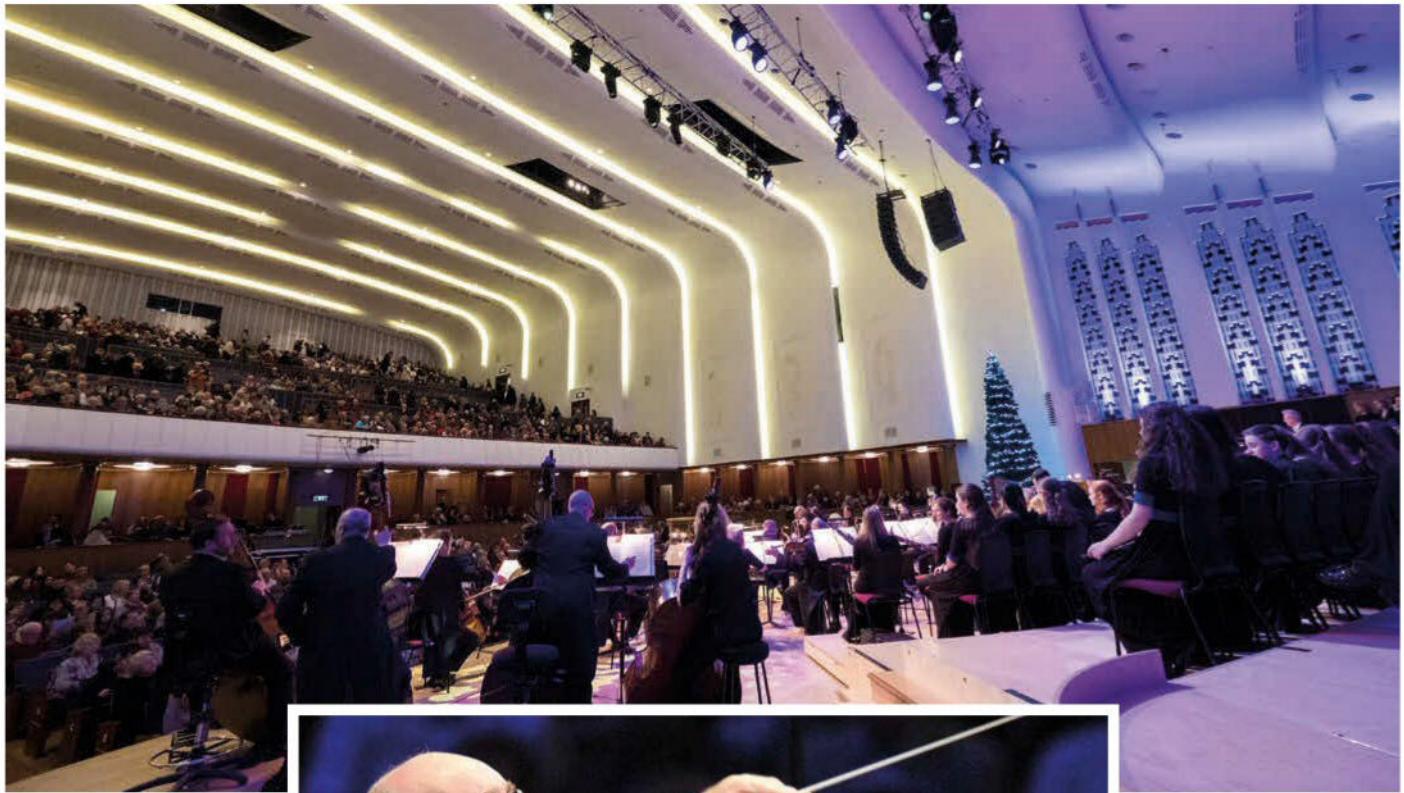


The Azrieli Foundation is pleased to announce that Avner Dorman is the winner of the 2018 Azrieli Prize for Jewish Music. His composition will be performed at the AMP Gala Concert on October 15th, 2018 by the McGill Chamber Orchestra with Guest Conductor Yoav Talmi.

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ANDREW MANZE



# VOYAGING WITH Vaughan Williams

Andrew Manze has adored Vaughan Williams's music since the age of 14 and, as he records the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, it's a journey with still so much to discover, writes Richard Bratby

**Y**ou always know when spring has arrived in Liverpool. The sky is a freshly rinsed blue, and gusts of sea air sweep from the Pier Head right up the hill to Hope Street. On any day, entering the Philharmonic Hall can feel a bit like climbing on board some great Art Deco ocean liner, but on this April morning there are actually seagulls wheeling around outside. Inside, Andrew Manze gives the slightest of gestures. The cellos and basses of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra lay down a low C, a pair of horns call softly, and Ralph Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony pushes away from the quayside: outward bound for the Celestial City.

'I heard that – the beginning of the Fifth Symphony – and I was just hooked from then on,' says Manze, when I ask him how Vaughan Williams entered his musical life. The dressing rooms at the Philharmonic Hall have recently been rebuilt, but the sofa's comfy enough, and Manze perches on the edge, buzzing with ideas about the two symphonies he's due to conduct tonight, the Fifth and Sixth. 'I was probably about 14, I think, when I was first exposed to Vaughan Williams,' he recalls. 'I played in the Bedford Youth Orchestra. We played the *Tallis Fantasia* and the teachers and conductors pointed me in the direction of the *Serenade to Music*. I remember borrowing the Boult recording and thinking how beautiful it was. I still think that. And, on the other side, paired with it, was the Fifth Symphony. The opening sounds of the symphony are so magical that they just pull you in.'

And now – well, few conductors in recent years have had quite such an impact on the way we hear Vaughan Williams. Aficionados have long spoken of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies (written respectively before, during and after the Second World War) as a sort of trilogy. 'No one has yet had the courage to play all three in one concert programme, but if they did it would be a revealing spiritual and musical experience,' wrote the late Michael Kennedy, shortly after Vaughan Williams's death. At the 2012 BBC Proms, Manze did precisely that with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, to overwhelming effect: *The Guardian* declared it 'a compelling and concentrated experience of the sort you rarely get in the concert hall'. Manze's recorded cycle with the RLPO began in 2016 with a pairing of the Second and Eighth Symphonies. The Third and Fourth appeared in the spring of 2017, and Andrew Achenbach, in these pages, praised the 'breathtaking

composure' of the playing that Manze drew from his Liverpool band.

Manze is in no doubt that the particular sound of the RLPO in the 1930s Philharmonic Hall is central to his cycle, just as it was for Vernon Handley's landmark set back in the late 1980s – though the hall has been upgraded since then, and the buses on Myrtle Street that are faintly audible on Handley's Fifth (or so I was once told; I've never been able to detect them) are no longer a problem. The essentials are still there, though. 'The orchestra, the concert hall and the sound they make go very much together. I don't know whether one causes the other, but it's a very special sound,' says Manze. 'The brass players have a warmth which goes very well with the strings, and that goes well with Vaughan Williams. Of course, there are moments in his music when he's very angry, very aggressive, but it's never a hard-edged Bartók or Stravinsky sort of sound, and that's why I

think the RLPO fits it so well. I don't know if you could call it "English", but when I hear them play Vaughan Williams, I just think, "Yes. This is so right"'

– Andrew Manze

think the RLPO fits it so well. I don't know if you could call it "English", but when I hear them play Vaughan Williams, I just think, "Yes. This is so right."

Which means he can give free rein to his own vision of this extraordinary music – and, of all Vaughan Williams's nine symphonies, the Fifth and Sixth surely drive closest to the heart of the matter. It's hard to imagine a more violently different pair of masterpieces. The radiant Fifth was premiered in the darkest days of 1943, but has its eyes fixed unwaveringly on the infinite. 'I met a lady in Glasgow who was at the premiere of the Fifth Symphony', says Manze, 'and she told me that people were in tears, because it was giving them such hope.' The cataclysmic Sixth (1948), however, begins amidst a musical firestorm and ends with a stunned, almost motionless Epilogue: music so bleak that for Cold War-era commentators it invariably evoked images of nuclear annihilation.

Vaughan Williams himself wasn't quite so sure about that (his own programme note for the Sixth is a masterclass in wry detachment), and nor is Manze. 'He has witnessed two world wars in his life, he's an old man – he's 75 – and that last movement, I feel, just sort of happened, almost despite himself. What was Adorno said? "After Auschwitz there can be no poetry." But as I get to know Vaughan Williams more and more, I've gone beyond asking, "Is this programmatic or not?" As with most of the great composers, everything he writes is a variation on himself. And so there's a moment in the middle of the Romanza of the Fifth Symphony where the strings

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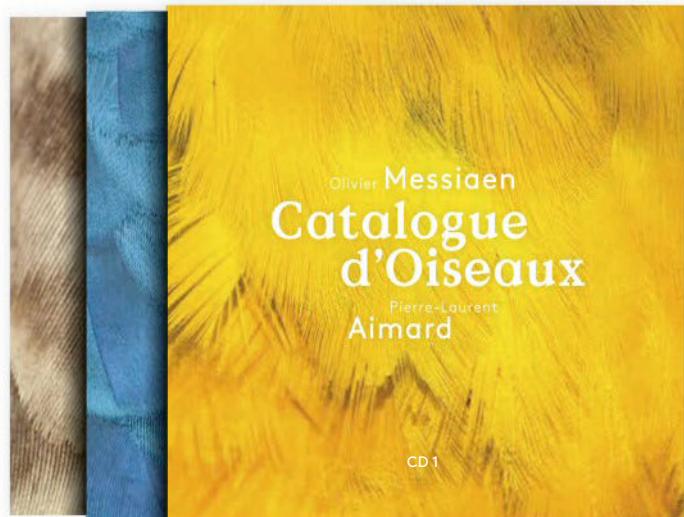
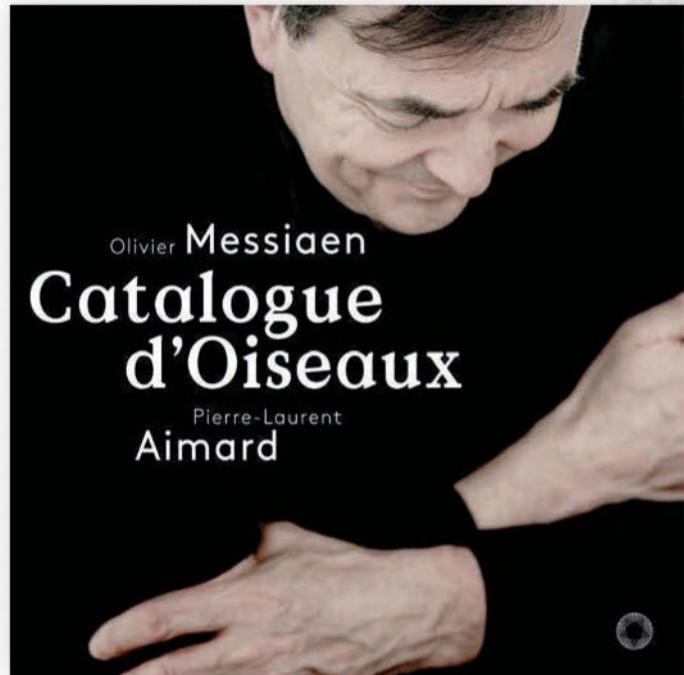
ABOUT THE ALBUM

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## Olivier Messiaen: Catalogue d'Oiseaux

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come up with the opening phrase of the Sixth Symphony. Now I'm guessing that Vaughan Williams didn't consciously think, "Oh, that's a useful phrase, I'll bear that in mind for another possible symphony." The Sixth definitely came as a big surprise to the audience, and it probably came as a bit of a surprise to Vaughan Williams too.'

Manze's enthusiasm for this music – and his boundless inquisitiveness – has something about it of the joy of discovery. That won't come as a surprise to people who still (and record collectors have long memories) think of Manze as an electrifying Baroque violinist. But he hasn't played the violin for a long time now, and his main priority since 2014 has been his role as Principal Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie in

Hanover, with whom he has recently completed a Mendelssohn symphony cycle (Richard Wigmore, reviewing in these pages, said that Manze's *Scottish Symphony* 'comes close to my ideal'). Working on the cycle, says the conductor, was an absolute joy. 'We had a wonderful time together. As a radio orchestra the NDR Radiophilharmonie is very flexible stylistically, and with Mendelssohn you really need to catch that transition between the Classical and Romantic.' A joint Hanover/Liverpool Britten *War Requiem* is scheduled for November, and when he talks about plans like these, he seems a long way from the violinist whose recordings of Heinrich Biber are still so cherished by collectors.

Or perhaps not. 'I see my time in the world of period instruments and historical performance practice, as rather like my time as a Classics student – as building vital, indispensable tools, which I now use,' he explains. 'When I went to Cambridge I was actually more interested in contemporary music, and I came out involved in the early music scene. The two had a lot in common – in each case, composers give performers the opportunity for creative participation. Nowadays, I'm sorry but I don't listen to much early music, because there's just not much of interest going on. Not very many musicians are accepting the composers' challenge, which is "meet me halfway". I'm sorry: I don't mean to be damning, but I feel in Baroque music, a gauntlet is thrown down – and it hasn't been picked up.'

But if that's so, isn't it doubly perverse to trade in his fiddle, and the interpretative freedom that goes with it, for the symphony orchestra, where that kind of creativity is surely even less likely? Manze doesn't see it like that. 'The orchestras who ask me are the ones who are interested in working that way. They are hungry for information. They are hungry for someone to help them make their Brahms sound different from their



Manze in Liverpool with the producer Andrew Keener

Beethoven. Orchestral musicians are so busy perfecting the technical side of their playing, and just simply coping with their workload, that they're grateful when someone comes in and works with them on sound and style – let's do our Brahms this way, and our Bruckner that way, and our Sibelius a totally different way.'

Or indeed their Stenhammar – a particular favourite of Manze. 'It's a personal thing for me, because I live in Stockholm and my wife is leader of the Royal Swedish Orchestra, but Stenhammar's music is so wonderful that I'm amazed we don't hear it more routinely in other countries. I've recorded his piano concertos but I'd love to record his major orchestral works.' A more immediate prospect is his next encounter with Vaughan

Williams: the *Sinfonia Antarctica*, which he's due to perform and record in Liverpool in June. Some would consider it the most problematic of Vaughan Williams's symphonies: Manze takes a broader perspective.

'I feel it and see it as a symphony in the Sibelius mould – a sort of tone poem symphony. I've been reading the literature associated with Scott's Antarctic expedition, and I'm sure

Vaughn Williams was aware of it too. We think of the Antarctic as a place that's white with snow and ice, but in fact when you read accounts by the explorers, they stress

how colourful it is, and that the one colour you very rarely see is pure white. It's an unbelievably colourful symphony, but it's also dealing with bravery, hardship and eventual tragedy – the deaths of these men.'

That human drama is what comes through so intensely in Manze's Vaughan Williams, and that evening after our interview, as he conducts the RLPO through the final bars of the Sixth, I'm surprised to feel the music warm slightly. Manze coaxes the violins to deepen their tone even as the music drifts on into silence, and I think of the lines from Shelley that Vaughan Williams wrote on the score of the *Sinfonia Antarctica*: 'To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite / To forgive wrongs darker than death or night'.

I ask Manze about it later. 'In the very dying moments we switched to free bowing, so it could be personal to each player and the music wouldn't run out of breath,' he says. 'It's still warm: the blood is still flowing.' As the Liverpool audience applauds, he lifts the score of the Sixth Symphony from the podium and holds it up. Vaughan Williams lives. The message remains urgent, and the voyage is far from over. **G**

*Andrew Manze's recording of Vaughan Williams's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies with the RLPO for Onyx will be reviewed in the next issue*



Manze: 'Everything VW writes is a variation on himself'

# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Richard Osborne finds Murray Perahia on formidable form in two pinnacles in Beethoven's output, with interpretations that stand among the finest available



### Beethoven

Piano Sonatas - No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2;

No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106

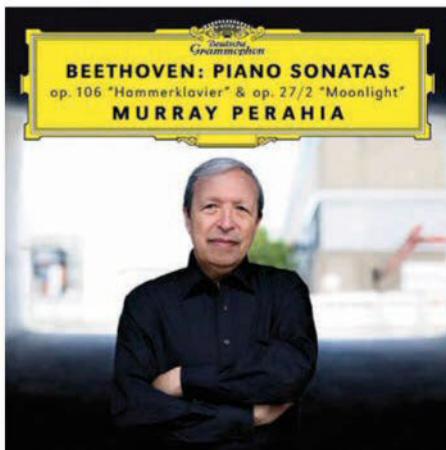
Murray Perahia *p/f*

DG ④ 479 8353 (56' • DDD)

The first thing we should do in approaching this musically remarkable and, in terms of its exploration of the composer's tempest-tossed inner life, extraordinarily fascinating addition to the Beethoven discography is banish all thoughts of moonlight.

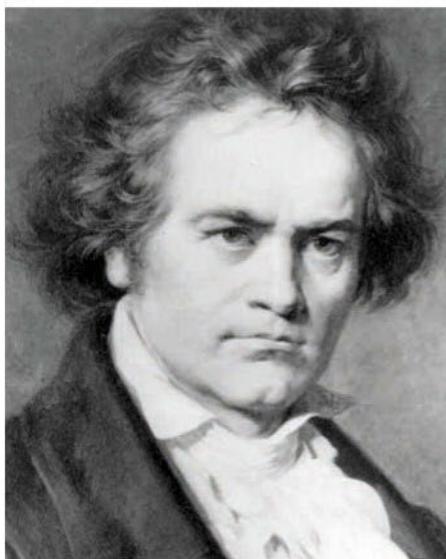
A further assumption it might be useful to set aside, as we attend to what Murray Perahia calls 'two of the most radically groundbreaking of the composer's 32 piano sonatas', is that the *Hammerklavier* is the more difficult of the two pieces. I'm not thinking here of the finger-wrenching challenge of actually delivering the *Hammerklavier*, something the unbridled fury of the finale of the earlier sonata interestingly presages. Rather, I'm thinking of the imaginative and technical challenges that the emotionally complex *Sonata quasi una fantasia* in the then alien key of C sharp minor presents to the player: first in seeking out its essence, then in distilling that essence on whatever keyboard circumstance or time provides. (As Charles Rosen observed, the sonata's finale shredded the pianos of 1801 as surely as its opening movement troubles more modern ones.)

One of the many problems presented by the meditative opening movement is that there is no ready-made solution to the question of the speed at which the music should move, other than that which the accomplished interpreter discovers for himself, be it Ignaz Friedman in one of the earliest of all recordings (Columbia, 2/27) or Murray Perahia today. Thus Solomon, in a famous HMV recording (10/54), takes



*'The ferocity with which the Moonlight's last two chords are delivered suggests that the composer's travails are not yet over'*

nearly nine minutes over the movement, whereas Perahia, in his luminously voiced yet at the same time emotionally riven performance, takes a little over five.



Beethoven: infinite courage, infinite suffering

And make no mistake, this is desolate music. 'A pale light glimmers above the whispered *pianissimo* triplets, from whose dark depths the grief-laden melody ascends', wrote Wilhelm Kempff, whose 1956 mono recording (DG, 10/57) is not dissimilar to Perahia's, for all that Kempff occasionally allows, for expressive effect, a barely perceptible pause in those whispered triplets. We re-encounter this mastery of musical discourse, albeit at greater length and on a higher plane, in Perahia's free-flowing yet lofty account of the great soliloquy that stands at the heart of the *Hammerklavier*.

Kempff was one of the few pianists of his generation who avoided ponderousness in the *Moonlight's* middle movement. Perahia, too, catches well the dance's melancholy grace and epigrammatic charm; and though his account of the Trio is properly robust, the almost hallucinatory quality Beethoven brings to the drone bass in the Trio's concluding bars is not lost on Perahia. Thus, when the dance returns, it too appears to have taken on something of the mood of barely suppressed pain that is the sonata's abiding characteristic.

It's been said that the work's undeniably angry finale tries too hard, is too repetitive. There's no sense of that in Perahia's reading, which has exactly the right degree of implacability, for all that he's happy to play Beethoven's game of false dawns with a gracious approach to the recapitulation and a decorous descent from the coda's emblazoning high trill to the pit below. The ferocity with which the two last chords are delivered suggests, however, that the composer's travails are not yet over.

A late chapter in this same story arrived with the composition of the *Hammerklavier* in 1818, by which time Beethoven had become, in JWN Sullivan's words, 'the great solitary', 'a man of infinite courage, infinite suffering'.



A fearless ambassador to an untamed spirit: Murray Perahia plays Beethoven

Much ink has been spilled on how rapidly the first movement should travel. ‘Uncommonly quick and fiery’ was Czerny’s judgement, an approach that echoes the spirit, if not the letter, of Beethoven’s hair-raising metronome mark. Artur Schnabel attempted that in his legendary HMV recording (11/36) made in exile in London in 1935, by which time the once ‘flawless’ playing (Claudio Arrau’s testimony) was no longer entirely flawless. For all his own tribulations in recent years, Perahia’s playing pretty well is. His approach to the first movement is never reckless yet it’s essentially ‘quick and fiery’, the fearless ambassador to a still untamed spirit.

Perahia is artist enough to know that great art is never, of itself, ugly. It may be Beethoven’s instinct to push every

component of the dauntingly complex contrapuntal finale to its logical conclusion (and beyond) but Perahia, though honouring the intent, declines to turn the music into a rout. In matters of musical diction, lucidity matters.

Not long before the sonata’s end, Beethoven introduces a three-part fugato, a lyric inspiration of rare beauty, limpid in D. In the context of this carefully gauged programme, we might be tempted to recall the similarly precarious beauties of the C sharp minor Sonata’s opening movement – except that, for some inexplicable reason, the producers have placed the sonata after the *Hammerklavier*. That lapse notwithstanding, this is a disc, naturally and vividly recorded, of rare distinction and pedigree. **G**

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**Editor’s Choice**

Martin Cullingford’s pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



# Orchestral



Hannah Nepil listens to the late Jiří Bělohlávek in Smetana:

'There's the lyrical ease of a conductor so at home in this idiom that he's prepared to be swept along by the musical tide' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



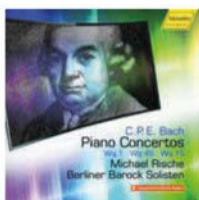
Rob Cowan is impressed by Sheku Kanneh-Mason's debut album:

'The playing, disarmingly gentle yet tonally seductive, has a songful use of vibrato that recalls Fournier and du Pré' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**

## CPE Bach

Piano Concertos - Wq1 H403; Wq15 H418; Wq45 H478

**Michael Rische** pf Berlin Baroque Soloists  
Hänssler Classic Ⓜ HC17034 (56' • DDD)



This is a disc to reinforce my feeling that Emanuel Bach's keyboard concertos are notoriously hard to bring off on the modern piano. Michael Rische certainly has the technique for the coruscating passagework in the fiery E minor Concerto, Wq15, most eccentric of the three works here. But his robust fluency in the *Allegros* and generalised sensitivity in the slow movements are not enough in music that needs greater subtlety of touch and timing if it is to work on the piano.

'It's all too loud and beefy' was my initial jotting during the opening movement of the A minor, Wq1, first of Emanuel's 50-odd keyboard concertos. The problem remained throughout the disc. Close miking and the resonant church acoustic do Rische no favours, and inflate the sonority of the expert modern-instrument orchestra, based on just 12 strings. But if the recording is hardly ideal, I sense no real imaginative engagement with concertos that only fitfully show CPE at his best. In Rische's hands the ubiquitous repeated-note bass lines plod or chug; and time and again phrases just seem to happen, without any discernible shaping or connection with what precedes and follows. A lighter, more playful touch, from soloist and orchestra, would have done wonders for the *galant* outer movements of the late D major Concerto, Wq45, which here jog rather earnestly.

Rische's obvious rival in these concertos is the indefatigable Miklós Spányi in his complete CPE Bach series for BIS, playing on the kinds of instruments Bach would have known. Figuration that too easily sounds mechanical on the piano becomes brilliant and idiomatic on the harpsichord

or fortepiano. Beyond that, Spányi brings to this music a verve, sparkle and sense of fantasy barely glimpsed in Rische's dutiful performances. **Richard Wigmore**

## Bartók

Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119<sup>a</sup>.

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz116

**Javier Perianes** pf Munich Philharmonic Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ HMM90 2262 (62' • DDD)



Late, late, Bartók – the pair of masterpieces that could and would have turned his fortunes around during his final years exiled in America. Financially embarrassed, terminally ill, it was not to be. Conductor and soloist are Spanish here, the orchestra German, and in that regard there is immediately an issue as we move from the mellow lyricism of the Third Piano Concerto to the multifaceted Concerto for Orchestra.

The Munich Philharmonic don't have quite the right *tinta* for this music. The sound is noble, the playing poetic, especially among the extensively showcased woodwinds. The second-movement 'Game of the Couples' – paced at a jaunty skip and jump – is full of personality, as are those lyric diversions (urban takes on Hungarian folk song) that provide haunting departures from the rough and tumble of the outer movements and the extraordinary Elegie. But the celebrated German blend, the 'cover', of so much of the string-playing does little for the searing exhortations which punctuate the Elegie's return to what sounds remarkably like Duke Bluebeard's 'Lake of Tears', hidden as it is behind the sixth door of his castle. One wants them raw and unvarnished, cries from the heart. Equally the cut and thrust of a Reiner or a Solti is conspicuously lacking in the whirling dances of the powerhouse finale. The string fugue emanating from the raunchy trumpet

tune is frankly flabby and 'academic'. So not really competitive in today's extensive catalogue.

The Third Piano Concerto fares better on account of its mellowness. This is such a departure from the brazen primitivism and percussiveness of the first two concertos – it is Bartók in repose contemplating his homeland from afar, half-remembered melodies given a singing expressiveness to which Javier Perianes brings great warmth. There are the Bachian allusions, too, which find fulfilment in the slow movement – one of the composer's most beautiful and reflective creations. There is, of course, the signature insect-rustling night music at its heart but that only heightens the return of the Bachian chorale with keyboard and orchestral winds in glorious accord, gradually evolving into something as deeply passionate as ever he wrote. One need not ask for whom the tam-tam tolls here.

The two Spaniards dispatch the finale's lust for life with the requisite panache, Bartók's remission evident in the resilience of the counterpoint. Still, though, there's an element of opaqueness about the overall sound which means that individual lines don't ring as keenly as they might. Plenty of better alternatives, I fear.

**Edward Seckerson**

## Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15<sup>a</sup>.

Symphony No 1, Op 21<sup>b</sup>

**Martha Argerich** pf

Mito Chamber Orchestra / Seiji Ozawa

Decca Ⓜ 483 2566DH (61' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Art Tower Mito, Mito City, Ibaraki, Japan, <sup>b</sup>January 10-15, <sup>a</sup>May 9-14, 2017



Seiji Ozawa is 82 and Martha Argerich is 76, yet they go at Beethoven's First Piano Concerto like a pair of teenagers. All of Argerich's playful, exploratory tics are there – tugging at tempos, sudden accents, accentuating inner lines and so on, and



Playful and exploratory: Martha Argerich and Seiji Ozawa pack a glorious punch in Beethoven

Ozawa's (judging from the booklet picture) tiny hand-picked Mito Chamber Orchestra are with her all the way. They pack a punch way beyond expectations, given the size of the forces, and Ozawa is not shy of the odd period touch, hard timp sticks being the most obvious example. The finale is as bubbly and cheeky as you're ever likely to hear it and provokes a huge ovation from the Japanese audience. It's an Op 15 to live with.

The First Symphony might almost seem to be the B-feature in such company but it's no such thing. Looking back at Beethoven from the wrong end of the telescope, as it were, you almost get the sense of its being the first step on the mammoth symphonic journey to follow over the next twenty-odd years, as Beethoven kicks off the 19th century with that famous subversion of C major. Ozawa isn't particularly a speed merchant but everything seems to fall perfectly into place and the streamlined dynamism of the band allows for all manner of detail to be spotlit and shaped. The Mito players naturally aren't the polished machine of certain Beethoven performances but the raw edge to the string sound is far from unwelcome and the woodwind all sound gorgeous.

Argerich remains indefatigable and, on this evidence, Ozawa may be entering a glorious Indian summer of creativity. A second instalment, already in Decca's vaults, can't arrive soon enough.

David Threasher

### Bruch · Elgar

**Bruch Violin Concerto No 1, Op 26**

**Elgar Violin Concerto, Op 61**

**Rachel Barton Pine vn**

**BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Litton**

Avie © AV2375 (76' • DDD)

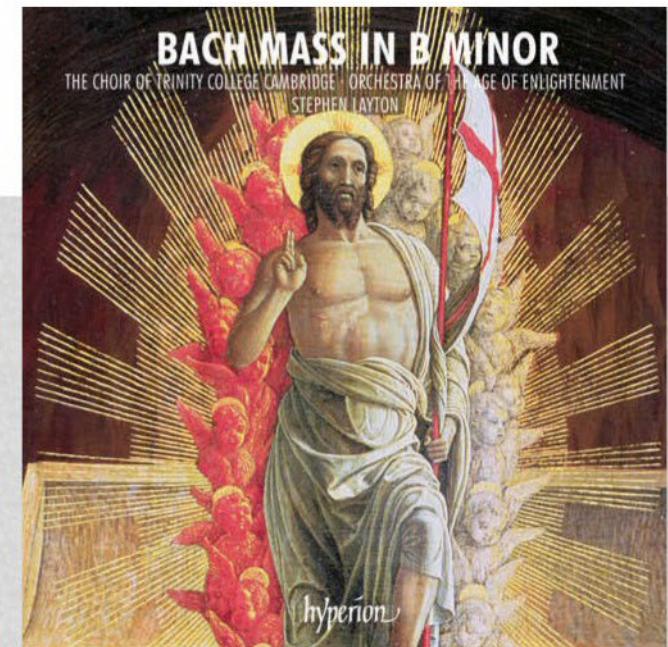


Sir Neville Marriner, who was originally to have conducted this recording, had a connection to Elgar's Violin Concerto, as he studied at the RCM with WH Reed, the violinist who served as Elgar's consultant regarding the practicability of the concerto's solo part. In her lovely booklet note, Rachel Barton Pine laments the fact that Marriner died shortly before the scheduled sessions but relishes the opportunity she had to discuss the score with him.

Andrew Litton, who stepped in on short notice, does a splendid job, in any event. And he and Pine seem to be of the same mind, homing in on the music's wistful qualities. One gets a strong whiff of melancholy right from start, thanks to Litton's careful observation of the *diminuendo* marking in the two-bar phrase that follows the main motif. Pine, for her part, allows the music to ask its questions without trying to answer them for us. Listen, for instance, at 5'12" in the same movement, where she allows one to feel Elgar searching through a maze of elusive harmonies.

Only once does Pine go her own way rather than Elgar's, and that's when the violin takes up the 'Windflower' theme at 6'25". Pine plays it with catch-in-the-throat tenderness that's ravishing, to be sure, but it's hardly *semplice* as Elgar indicates. Zehetmair, for one, demonstrates that exquisiteness and simplicity are not mutually exclusive (Hallé, 8/10). Otherwise, though, Pine's interpretation is as emotionally satisfying as it is dazzling. The slow movement is mysteriously veiled and luminous, providing a palpable sense of the music's darker undercurrents.

The American violinist is most impressive, perhaps, in the finale, where her easy



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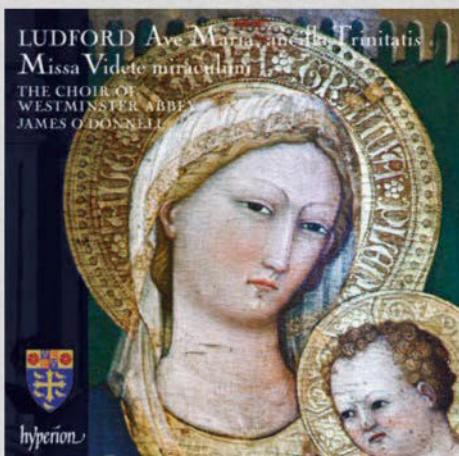
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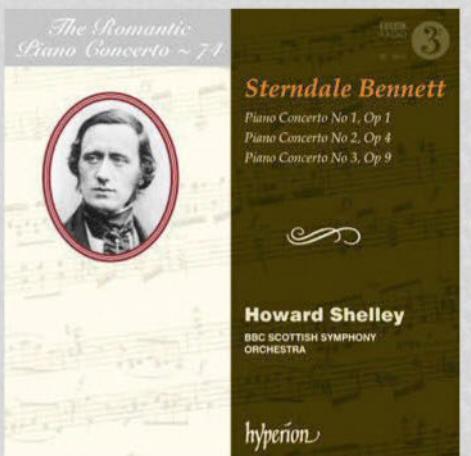
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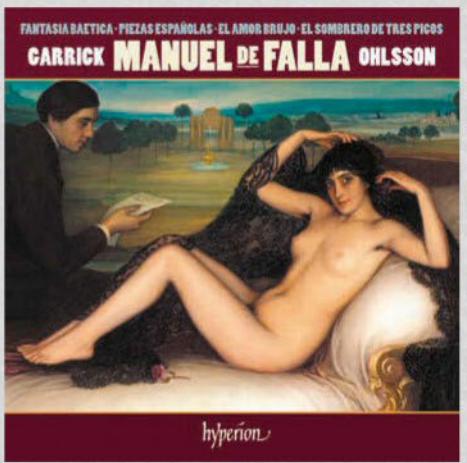
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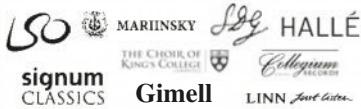
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virtuosity sends sparks flying, though never at the expense of the long line. She makes expressive sense of even the thorniest passages, as at 3'00", with a sense of deeply felt, improvisatory grace. Elgar wrote that his concerto 'enshrined a soul', and particularly in the finale Pine seems to embody that soul, dancing and soaring above the orchestra. The long cadenza is expertly paced, and then the coda plunges ahead with thrilling inevitability.

Bruch's G minor Concerto is certainly not what I'd choose to hear after the Elgar, although the performance is wholly persuasive in its mittel-European heartiness. The outer movements abound with snap and spice, and the *Adagio* has a warm solemnity that, one might argue, offers a foretaste of Elgarian *nobilmente*. The recorded sound is glorious, with a near-ideal balance between soloist and orchestra. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Bruckner · R Strauss

**Bruckner Symphony No 3 (1877 version, ed Nowak)** **R Strauss** *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* – Suite, Op 60<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Gerhard Oppitz** pf

**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Riccardo Muti**  
DG M ② 479 8180GH2 (103' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 15, 2016



The recordings on this two-CD set originate from a concert at the Salzburg Festival celebrating Riccardo Muti's 75th birthday. Both works were first heard in performances by the Vienna Philharmonic under the baton of their respective composers, and the orchestra also performed the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* suite in a concert conducted by Strauss for his own 75th birthday. By contrast, Bruckner conducted the Vienna Philharmonic only once, and this is only the orchestra's second recording of his Second Symphony, the first being Horst Stein's studio version of 1973 (Decca Eloquence, 3/75).

The CD booklet tells us that Muti regards the Second Symphony as the most Italianate of the cycle, and he offers a warm and engaging performance of the score. It's a pity, however, that he prefers the superseded Nowak edition of the symphony, arguably the least satisfactory from an editorial perspective. Not only does it replicate the merging of different versions of the score from the earlier Haas edition, it offers the conductor a number of

optional cuts, which results in different recordings offering slightly different versions of the text. Solti, for example, restores the material from the first, second and fourth movements, while Karajan takes an intermediate approach by restoring the unhelpful cut in the finale. Muti, by contrast, follows conductors such as Jochum and Giulini in adopting all of the cuts indicated by Nowak.

Under Muti's direction, the Vienna Philharmonic's playing is rich and detailed, with dynamics and tempo markings carefully observed. The passage for solo flute and violin in the coda of the *Andante* is exquisitely rendered, and the playing of the solo clarinet at the end makes this passage almost as moving as the original version scored for horn. Elsewhere, Muti brings a strong sense of purpose to the performance, with only the last degree of intensity missing from climactic passages.

The performance of the *Bourgeois gentilhomme* suite also benefits greatly from the presence of the Vienna Philharmonic, with engaging solos from the likes of oboe, horn and solo violin, the latter provided by concertmaster Rainer Küchl on the eve of his retirement with the orchestra. There's also a fine contribution from pianist Gerhard Oppitz. Muti's interpretation is characterful and sharply etched, with a keen sense of the parodic elements in the final movement, although Muti's relaxed tempos occasionally sound over-deliberate and undermine the sense of spontaneity. Kempe's early 1970s recording with the Staatskapelle Dresden (EMI/Warner, 10/73) offers an altogether much more affectionate approach, and Reiner's version from 1956 (Sony/RCA) is even finer still, although he omits the two Lully-inspired numbers from the nine-movement suite. As with the symphony, the recording is clear and vivid, with applause retained before and after the performance.

**Christian Hoskins**

## Dvořák · Penderecki

**Dvořák Symphony No 7, Op 70** **B141 Penderecki**  
**Symphony No 2, 'Christmas Symphony'**  
**Sinfonia Varsovia / Krzysztof Penderecki**  
Warner Classics ⑫ 9029 57327-2 (73' • DDD)



Don't approach  
Krzysztof  
Penderecki's  
*Christmas*

*Symphony* expecting sleigh bells and festive frolics. It's a dark, sombre work, more 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse' than 'Three Wise Men'. Commissioned

by Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic, it is an overtly tonal work, coming after the crunchy chord clusters of his avant-garde First Symphony. There's a late 19th-century richness and neo-Romantic language to the writing, brooding and densely scored. Composition began on Christmas Eve 1979 and the symphony contains a brief four-note phrase quoting the opening of the carol 'Silent Night' (first heard at 3'52"), hence its unofficial subtitle.

Penderecki has recorded the Second before, with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra for EMI in 1983, but revisits the work here with the Sinfonia Varsovia, of which he has been artistic director since 2003. He takes a marginally more expansive view second time around and enjoys a weightier recording, the Varsovia brass on particularly impressive form, with brutal punch to the chords at 11'18". After its knotty development and scherzo, there's some lustrous heroic glitter (31'15") before the symphony sinks into its resigned finale. It's a fine account but doesn't necessarily displace Antoni Wit's recording, which is marginally tighter and enjoys decent 1999 Naxos sound.

The choice of coupling is rather odd – few things could be further from the *Christmas Symphony*'s gloom than Dvořák's sunny Seventh – but Penderecki offers a sprightly reading with plenty of pep. The Warsaw woodwinds charm and chirrup in the symphony's pastoral moments and the Scherzo is light on its feet, at a similar tempo to Rafael Kubelík's much-loved Berlin Philharmonic recording on DG. The finale rolls along at a portly gait where the blood needs to pump a little more urgently, but the playing is entirely amiable. **Mark Pullinger**

Penderecki – selected comparisons:

Polish Nat RSO, Penderecki (WARN) 2435 74852-5

Polish Nat RSO, Wit (NAXO) 8 554492

Dvořák – selected comparison:

BPO, Kubelík (DG) 463 158-2GB6 or 477 9764GM2

## Gershwin

'The Gershwin Moment'

**Gershwin** Piano Concerto<sup>a</sup>, Rhapsody in Blue<sup>a</sup>, Summertime<sup>b</sup> **Gershwin/Wild Virtuoso** Études after Gershwin<sup>c</sup> – Embraceable you; I got rhythm; Somebody loves me **Levant** Blame it on my youth<sup>d</sup>

**Kirill Gerstein** pf with

<sup>b</sup>**Storm Large** voc <sup>d</sup>**Gary Burton** vibraphone

<sup>a</sup>**St Louis Symphony Orchestra / David Robertson**  
Myrios ⑫ MYRO22 (74' • DXD)  
Recorded live at the <sup>d</sup>Berklee Performance Center, Boston, March 30, 2012; <sup>b</sup>Williams Theatre, Kalamazoo, MI, May 8, 2014; <sup>ac</sup>Powell Hall, St Louis, MO, April 7-9, 2017



If most of Gershwin may be said to have entered the musical DNA of the United States almost as soon as the ink dried on the page, his music nevertheless has profited by recent scholarly scrutiny. Perhaps the most important cache of Gershwin materials, held at the Library of Congress, has revealed the extent to which Gershwin's original voice was blunted and tamed down in order to conform to what his well-meaning publishers considered 'acceptable'. The first-ever critical edition of the music and lyrics of George and Ira Gershwin is now under way at the University of Michigan and a number of recordings, reflecting new attitudes towards the composer, including those of Steven Richman and Harmonie Ensemble/New York, have begun to appear. In terms of imaginative realisation, edgy stylishness and sheer opulence of sound, none outclass, in my opinion, this extraordinary new release by Kirill Gerstein with the St Louis Symphony under David Robertson, along with other artists.

Gerstein needs no introduction, but it may be worth recalling that he moved from his native Voronezh to Boston on a jazz scholarship when he was 14. What he serves up here is living, breathing Gershwin that doesn't shy from improvisation and yet retains all the crystal clarity and architectural cohesion of his interpretations of Liszt and Brahms. The result is sizzlin', sassy and smooth, and Robertson and his St Louis musicians are there every spontaneous step of the way. Both the Concerto and the *Rhapsody in Blue* are tours de force, and easily claim a place among the great readings, be they by Levant, Sanromá, Wild or Gershwin himself.

Of the smaller things, Levant's 'Blame it on my youth' with vibraphonist Gary Burton is the occasion for some intimate music-making of touching simplicity. The highest compliment payable to Storm Large's sultry delivery of Strawberry Woman's 'Summertime', redolent of the style of Billie Holiday, may be that she sings it as well as any white woman I know. Meanwhile, Gerstein pulls off the Wild transcriptions, which have become quite fashionable, like nobody else.

Gerstein's music-making is direct from the heart, unsentimental but rich in sentiment. It's also a bullseye evocation of that unique era of the 1920s and '30s, with its blend of hedonism and hope at the edge of an abyss. And if something in the

Mozartian grace and elegance of the Concerto's finale doesn't touch your heart, you may want to consult a cardiologist.

**Patrick Rucker**

## Greenwood · Mozart

**Greenwood Water<sup>a</sup>**

**Mozart Eine kleine Nachtmusik, K525<sup>b</sup>**

**Australian Chamber Orchestra /**

**Richard Tognetti vn**

ABC Classics (F) D ABC481 5736 or 6494;

(F) (O) ABC481 4573 (vinyl available in Australia only; 31' • DDD)

Recorded live at <sup>b</sup>City Recital Hall, Sydney, May 2011; <sup>a</sup>Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, November 2014



ABC's press release puts it neatly on the line: 'The Australian Chamber Orchestra and ABC Classics present the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, featuring the premiere recording of *Water* by Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood.' This is a project clearly conceived for two-sided vinyl. It's a shame then that, although this album can be downloaded and streamed, the physical product is available only in Australia.

For those not in the know, Radiohead is an English rock band that was formed in the mid-1980s and has sold well over 30 million albums. Jonny Greenwood plays lead guitar, keyboard and other instruments, and on the evidence of *Water* is acutely responsive to the entire aural spectrum. *Water* opens to instruments overlapping in their high registers, before we sense the depths of a river bed with a gentle bass drone and some very expressive string-writing, the solo violin playing a key role. Textures gradually thicken, then slim down again, while keeping to a moderate pace, although there are a couple of energetic interludes, the last suggesting a string-based mirror-image of rock. Mostly elegiac, atmospheric and innovative – *Water* is scored for strings, flutes, keyboard, piano and two Indian tanpura (a long-necked plucked string instrument) – the overall impression is of cultural cross-pollination creatively employed.

Conductor Richard Tognetti considers the pairing with *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* 'a curated, deliberate juxtaposition', though speaking personally I'd rather do my own curating (via my own CD collection) rather than having it imposed on me. More Jonny Greenwood would have opened my ears whereas Tognetti's characteristically stylish account of the Mozart is, for all its

pleasurable impact, neither here nor there, especially as you have to turn the vinyl disc over so that any idea of a creative segue is lost. Still, I do like the occasional alternation of full and solo strings. Applause bursts in at the end of the Mozart, indicating that the recordings are live, although there is no audible evidence of an audience during the actual performances. Playing and recording are excellent. **Rob Cowan**

## Jacob · Leighton · Patterson

'British Violin Concertos'

**Jacob Concerto for Violin and String Orchestra**

**Leighton Concerto for Violin and Small**

**Orchestra, Op 12 Patterson Violin Concerto**

**No 2, 'Serenade'**

**Clare Howick vn BBC Scottish Symphony**

**Orchestra / Grant Llewellyn**

Naxos (M) 8 573791 (68' • DDD)



All three composers were (or are) career academics, but it's notable how Paul Patterson's concerto of 2013 wants most to step out of the ivory tower and entertain. Kenneth Leighton's concerto isn't his best piece despite containing some of his boldest (albeit conservative) music while Gordon Jacob's appears to be hung up on a certain strand of modality from which his teacher Herbert Howells managed to unlock far more progressive and less self-satisfied ideas.

All three works are scored for relatively small orchestra and Paul Conway's booklet note describes the soloist-*tutti* interaction as 'telling dialogues ... rather than ... an individual pitted against the mob'. Again, all three handle that element of concerto form differently and I'm afraid, once more, it's Jacob who comes off worst with the 'now me, now you' exchanges in his first movement not doing much to aid interest or momentum.

On that front, Patterson's piece is the most appealing. The opening movement has something of Martinů's spirited, kinetic bustle, unperturbed even when it runs into tangled woodwind thickets (the instrumentation, all over the piece, is delicious). I love the final movement's brisk orchestral unfurling towards the cadenza and the increasing harmonic grind thereafter, heading to the hinterlands of Szymanowski. Clare Howick is often more muscular than she is nostalgic and that's fine – especially in the slow movement with its own whiff of stale English modality – and her performance tells you the piece was written for her.

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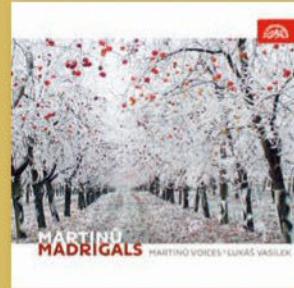
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Leighton slices through his opening movement with a jagged blade of a theme à la Bartók but the rest of the piece, particularly its elegiac epilogue movement, can't quite follow the imposition of that idea and we hear too little of the counterpoint and etched detail at which Leighton could excel. For all the finding of faults, it's good to hear these pieces in such agile, colourful and committed performances. **Andrew Mellor**

## Mahler

**Symphony No 5**

**Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne / François-Xavier Roth**

Harmonia Mundi  HMM90 5285 (71' • DDD)



On the reverse of the accompanying booklet (of which more anon) much is made of the

Gürzenich Orchestra's association with Mahler's Fifth, an involvement beginning with the work's first public performance in 1904. The suggestion that this 'patently places this version in a class of its own' is a bit rich given that it's not long since the Cologne band recorded the work under erstwhile chief Markus Stenz. Quite apart from which no German ensemble can boast an unbroken Mahler tradition.

In keeping with the text-centred objectivity expected these days, the actual reading feels positively forensic but acquires a more disruptive profile as it proceeds, determined not to underplay disparities of tempo and dynamic. The Scherzo rarely sounds this fresh, its first Trio daringly unhurried. Authentic or not, the *Adagietto* has a playing time approaching that of the famously emotive Leonard Bernstein version. Osmo Vänskä's recent account is slower than either but in Cologne the main body of the movement acquires a hushed, virginal quality marked off from a more confident, thrusting central section. Both newcomers present a surprisingly deliberate and equivocal finale. While arguably lacking clout, the argument never gets bogged down here as it sometimes does in Minnesota and you might even find Roth's light-textured neoclassicism more convincing than Bernstein's traditional grandstanding as we reach the closing chorale.

Throughout Roth secures string-playing that is super-articulate with no shortage of special effects, trumpets and horns kept on a tight rein in what sounds like a dryish studio. Will older hands consider the results emotionally engaged or merely

sharp-eared and brilliant? That is the question posed by the incisive funeral march and I'm not sure I can answer it except to report that I was totally won over by the close.

If there is a downside, it relates to the booklet which in its earliest incarnation contains only French and German. We are assured that this is merely a production glitch, and future pressings will be corrected. Indeed, trilingual presentation is available on the Harmonia Mundi website. **David Gutman**

*Selected comparisons:*

VPO, Bernstein (8/88) (DG) 423 608-2GH,  
459 080-2GX16, 477 5181GB5, 477 6334GGP  
or 477 8668GB11

Gürzenich Orch, Stenz (1/10) (OEHM) OC650

## Mahler

**Symphony No 7**

**Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Mariss Jansons**

RCO Live  RCO17006 (80' • DDD/DSD)  
Recorded live, September 28-30, 2016



I barely recognise the symphony I know and love as being wild and wonderful, elemental, fantastical, startling, from this beautifully executed (well, it is the Royal Concertgebouw) but oddly sanitised performance. It's as if health and safety have had a hand in its rehabilitation. All that is awkward and/or dangerous has been made safe, rough edges made smooth, rhythms and sforzandos blunted. The huge variety of orchestral colour contained within the piece has been homogenised into something uniformly lush but anonymous. The effect is merely cosmetic.

The originality of the opening, with its gruff tenor tuba over eddying strings, is here compromised by the altogether too lovely and mellowed sound of the solo and a manner too cultured by half. With contours softened and rhythms sluggish (unusual for Jansons), this whole first movement begins to sound lugubrious as opposed to atavistic. Precious little is made of tempo contrasts – indeed, contrasts in general – and because the sound is so uniformly warm and inviting, the contrast of that marvellous middle section where we are wafted to higher regions does not stand apart from what enfolds it. Note, too, Jansons's precious phrasing of the lovely second subject on its first appearance, every rubato and hairpin calculated to the *n*th degree. Even the brash and brassy paganistic procession of the coda sounds woolly to me.

The two *Nachtmusiks* bring the kind of ravishment you would expect from this orchestra (especially the first horn) – but the characterisation is bland and the music's other-worldly mystique is nowhere. As for the central Scherzo – spooky as they come – nothing truly goes bump in the night and all its grotesque grunts and guffaws and 'boo' effects (including the snap-pizzicato in lower strings, which is the loudest dynamic in the piece) are far too polite.

The finale's 'apotheosis of the dance' is nothing if not thoroughly audacious and this must be the dullest performance I've ever heard in terms of its characterisation (always so crucial in Mahler). It's like it's been reprimanded for bad behaviour and all its raucousness taken in hand. Rarely does the opening timpani- and trumpet-led tattoo fail to excite – but super-incisive this is not (the timpanist sounds way too casual about his big moment). Even the spectacular coda – and especially its thrilling final crescendo – goes for nothing. Whatever this is, it isn't Mahler's Seventh.

**Edward Seckerson**

## Paderewski

**Piano Concerto, Op 17<sup>a</sup>. Danses polonoises, Op 5.  
Elegia, Op 4. Menuet célèbre, Op 14 No 1.  
Miscellanea, Op 16 - No 1, Légende; No 2,  
Mélodie; No 4, Nocturne**

**Dang Thai Son** *pf*

**Philharmonia Orchestra / Vladimir Ashkenazy**  
Fryderyk Chopin Institute  NIFCD051  
(70' • DDD)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live at the National Philharmonic Concert Hall, Warsaw, August 27, 2015



Dang Thai Son nearly shot to fame in 1980 by winning the 10th International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, the first time an Asian pianist had won an international competition. His triumph, you may remember, was upstaged by the elimination of Ivo Pogorelich in the third round, causing jury member Martha Argerich to walk out, creating a media storm. Who the long-term winner was is a moot point; but Son, who will celebrate his 60th birthday in July, must be the least famous of all Chopin gold medallists.

This new recording – one of few examples of his art on disc – is a curious affair. Though commendable, it is not one that inflames the senses and makes you long for more. The most successful section of the disc is a rare live performance of Paderewski's Piano Concerto from 2015 under the baton of the ubiquitous Vladimir



Gentle swagger: Lisa Batiashvili captures the sardonic spirit of Prokofiev, in partnership with Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Ashkenazy. It is a fine performance, with tempos much in line with Jesús María Sanroma's premiere recording of 1939 (Son takes a more relaxed view of the *Romanza*) and, more surprisingly, the benchmark of Earl Wild (1970 with Arthur Fiedler). Surprisingly, because Wild is spine-tinglingly good – even without the little extras he throws in to heat things up further in the finale – as opposed to Son, who gets through it with great flair and no mishaps.

The concerto is preceded by studio recordings (May 2017) of eight solo items. Here, I'm afraid, I was disappointed. Son's playing is so introspective that it seems impolite to intrude on such private reverie. The first 20 minutes, all in much the same mood and tempo, are somewhat enervating. Take, for instance, the ineffably lovely Nocturne from the Op 16 *Morceaux*. Son's mannered playing insists on telling you how ineffably lovely it is, every bar weighted with significance. Jonathan Plowright (Warner Classics, 11/17), Stephen Hough (Nimbus or Erato) and the composer himself (1922) are among those who let the music speak for itself.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

Piano Concerto – selected comparison:

Wild, LSO, Fiedler (5/71<sup>b</sup>) (SONY) 88875 03074-2

## Prokofiev

'Visions of Prokofiev'

Violin Concertos - No 1, Op 19; No 2, Op 63.  
Cinderella, Op 87 – Grand Waltz<sup>a</sup>. The Love for  
Three Oranges – Grand March<sup>a</sup>. Romeo and  
Juliet, Op 64 – Dance of the Knights<sup>a</sup>  
(arr T Batiashvili)

**Lisa Batiashvili vn Chamber Orchestra of Europe /  
Yannick Nézet-Séguin**

DG (F) 479 8529 (60' • DDD)



It was a nice idea to spice a logical Prokofiev concerto coupling with a trio of transcriptions, the musician who crafted them so skilfully Lisa Batiashvili's father, Tamás. Years ago the *Cinderella* Grand Waltz was seductively turned by David Oistrakh, part of a sequence of five pieces from the ballet arranged by Mikhail Fikhtengolts. In fact Alto has released a CD featuring Oistrakh's vintage Melodiya recordings of these jewels alongside the two violin concertos (ALC1318), the First under Kondrashin, the Second under Galliera, wonderful performances all of them, and so full of character. Batiashvili effectively echoes Oistrakh's warmth and

there's a definite boon in having an orchestral accompaniment securely led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin rather than Yampolsky's piano, excellent though that is. It was Heifetz who most famously gave us the *Love for Three Oranges* March on the violin; and although the March of the Knights from *Romeo and Juliet* works reasonably well – especially in such a powerful performance – by concentrating on a single voice the transcription rather pushes the piece off balance.

But these are just the fill-ups, after all. As to the concertos, Nézet-Séguin cues a fine-spun accompaniment at the start and close of No 1, whereas he, the COE and Batiashvili collude for a carping attack at the centre of the Scherzo, rather like Gringolts and Neeme Järvi do in the same passage. Some tempo changes are quite violent: in the first movement of the First Concerto, for example, at the point where the soloist switches to a wildly strumming pizzicato (6'07" in this context), though I like Batiashvili's gentle swagger earlier on in the movement. She perfectly captures the music's sardonic spirit without overdoing the aggression. I also appreciate her free-flowing way with the solo opening of the Second Concerto, her subtle use of portamento and the sweetness of the first

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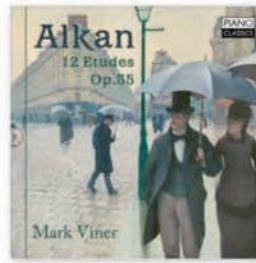
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movement's second subject. The bittersweet second movement, which is ideally paced, has an appropriate air of chasteness about it, and as always Nézet-Séguin keeps woodwind lines well to the fore. That said, this admirable trait becomes a mite distracting at 1'33" into the finale of the First Concerto, where the bassoon's presence is so conspicuous that for a while you're aware of nothing else, or at least I was. But otherwise I was grateful for having so much detail brought to my attention.

As to selected rivals, I retain a strong affection for Frank Peter Zimmermann with Lorin Maazel in the First Concerto and James Ehnes with Gianandrea Noseda in the two coupled together; but if you haven't yet heard David Oistrakh in No 1 (preferably the Kondrashin version – Melodiya, 8/63) and Jascha Heifetz in No 2 (under Charles Munch – RCA, 1/61) then, thinking in terms of Prokofiev's violin concertos, you haven't lived. Batiashvili is a very fine advocate of both works who lacks just an element of personality. **Rob Cowan**

*Violin Concerto No 1 – selected comparisons:*

FP Zimmermann, BPO, Maazel

(12/88<sup>e</sup>) (EMI/WARN) 206860-2

Gringolts, Gothenburg SO, N Järvi

(9/04) (DG) 474 814-2GH

*Violin Concertos – selected comparison:*

Ehnes, BBC PO, Noseda (10/13) (CHAN) CHAN10787

## Saint-Saëns · Offenbach

**Offenbach** Les contes d'Hoffmann - Barcarolle

(arr Sedla)<sup>a</sup>. Introduction, prière et boléro, Op 22. Les larmes de Jacqueline, Op 76 No 1.

La vie parisienne - Je suis brésilien (arr Bares)<sup>b</sup>

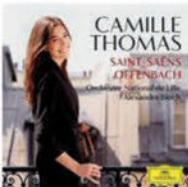
**Saint-Saëns** Cello Concerto No 1, Op 33. Suite, Op 16b. Samson et Dalila - Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix

**Camille Thomas** vc with <sup>b</sup>Rolando Villazón ten

<sup>a</sup>Nemanja Radulović vn <sup>a</sup>Ensemble Double Sens;

Lille National Orchestra / Alexandre Bloch

DG ④ 479 7520GH (68' • DDD)



Those familiar with Saint-Saëns's First Cello Concerto will know that there is no orchestral introduction. The soloist enters on the second beat of the very first bar. So the listener has no time, as in traditional concerto form, to adjust to the tempo, orchestral sound and balance, or absorb any thematic or motivic exposition before the soloist comes in. Saint-Saëns gives you a headlong assault. My first reaction was that Camille Thomas, a new name to me, has all the requisite technique and produces a sound I can only liken to drinking hot

chocolate: delicious, warming, full of flavour. You know at once you are in safe hands. Hers is a version of this much-recorded concerto I like very much indeed, not least for her subtle and judicious use of portamento throughout.

But there's more. The photogenic Franco-Belgian cellist further underlines her romantic credentials – if I can put it like that – with an unexpectedly moving performance of a transcription of 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' from *Samson et Dalila*. An equally winning account of the Op 16b Suite follows, in the same vein as the excellent Gabriel Schwabe (Naxos, 1/18).

While Schwabe pursues Saint-Saëns's other works for cello and orchestra, Thomas opts for Offenbach (himself a virtuoso cellist in his youth) and another vocal transcription, joining forces with the charismatic Serbian violinist Nemanja Radulović for an arrangement of the Barcarolle from *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. ('Song', writes Thomas, 'has always played a big part in my own artistic approach.') It's charming enough, but more important is what comes next, the only recording I have found of Offenbach's *Introduction, prière et boléro*, published in 1840. I think you'll find other cellists will be queuing to record this, a tuneful and showy 12-minute addition to the catalogue.

Whether or not it was a wise decision to conclude her DG debut by allowing Rolando Villazón to thoroughly upstage her in 'Je suis brésilien' from *La vie parisienne* is a moot point. Be that as it may, I hope Camille Thomas's next recording might be Offenbach's *Concerto militaire*, for she is so thoroughly in tune with his world. Whatever her choice, I look forward to hearing it. **Jeremy Nicholas**

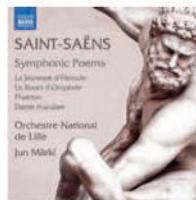
## Saint-Saëns

'Symphonic Poems'

Symphonic Poems - No 1, Le rouet d'Omphale, Op 31; No 2, Phaéton, Op 39; No 3, Danse macabre, Op 40; No 4, La jeunesse d'Hercule, Op 50. Marche héroïque, Op 34. Sarabande et Rigaudon, Op 93

**Lille National Orchestra / Jun Märkl**

Naxos ④ 8 573745 (55' • DDD)



Saint-Saëns's symphonic poems are rarely gathered together on disc. From the UK, there are strong collections from Charles Dutoit and the Philharmonia (Decca), and Neeme Järvi and the RSNO (Chandos). But why have French orchestras

been so reluctant to record them?

Conductors like Jean Martinon and Georges Prêtre championed the symphonies but the only collection of the four symphonic poems by a French orchestra I can track down is an LP by Pierre Dervaux and the Orchestre de Paris (nla). In the July 1973 issue of *Gramophone*, John Warrack dismissed the music as 'Saint-Saëns's bland muse' and the performances as 'lucid, unsensational, but graphic'.

Step forwards Jun Märkl, whose tenure as music director at the Orchestre National de Lyon – which yielded a fine set of Debussy recordings for Naxos – was acknowledged in 2012 when he was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture. Here he does the honours with the Orchestre National de Lille in splendid accounts.

Hercules appears in two of the symphonic poems, and so a photo of Giambologna's marble sculpture *Hercules Slaying the Centaur* features on the disc's cover. In *La jeunesse d'Hercule* ('The Youth of Hercules'), our hero is torn between virtue and pleasure, rejecting the latter but only after a bacchanale (tame by comparison with that from Saint-Saëns's opera *Samson et Dalila*). Märkl is steadier than Järvi here but the Lille strings offer virginal piety. Woodwinds whirr and chatter garrulously in *Le rouet d'Omphale* ('Omphale's Spinning Wheel'), even if Dutoit's strings are clothed in more Mendelssohnian gossamer.

There is no mention of the soloist taking on the role of skeletal fiddler in the *Danse macabre*, though it is presumably Fernand Iaci, long-standing leader since 1984, who cuts an elegant balance between demonic aggression and sweetness. The xylophone rattle and *col legno* strings are devilishly good.

My favourite of the four is *Phaéton*. Desperate to prove he descends from the sun god Helios, he begs to be allowed to drive his chariot across the sky, with disastrous consequences. Märkl is fleet-footed, with delicate lightness to the harp and strings after the brassy introduction, woodwinds chattering vividly as the wild horses gallop away. Naxos's detailed recording clearly catches the timpani rumble in the descending string figures (from 4'06") and there's a strong climax as Zeus's thunderbolt strikes Phaéton down, leading to his burial by mourning nymphs.

Järvi's fillers are more generous (77 minutes versus Naxos's 55) and more attractive, including the *Samson et Dalila* Bacchanale and the 'Marche militaire'

française' from the *Suite algérienne*. Märkl opts for the plucky *Marche héroïque*, a symbol of resistance during the Siege of Paris, and the elegant but calorific mock-baroque of the *Sarabande and Rigaudon*.

#### Mark Pullinger

*Symphonic poems – selected comparisons:*

Philib Orch, Dutoit (12/81<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 425 021-2DM

RSNO, N Järvi (9/12) (CHAN) CHSA5104

## Schubert

Symphonies - No 2, D125; No 5, D485

Antwerp Symphony Orchestra /

Philippe Herreweghe

PHI (F) LPHO28 (60' • DDD)



It's often said (with just cause) that the spirit of Mozart hovers over the 18-year-old Schubert's Fifth Symphony. Not only in the effortless songfulness of much of the work, nor the Scherzo, which blatantly takes as its text the equivalent movement of Mozart's late G minor Symphony, K551, but especially in the quicksilver turns from sunny major to troubled minor, a trait Schubert learnt from the Salzburger and made an integral part of his own language as he and his music grew more mature.

It's just as clear that the guiding hand behind the Second Symphony, begun a couple of years before the Fifth, is early Beethoven. This work has trumpets, drums, clarinets and a second flute, which the later symphony goes without; and, accordingly, the sound world is more majestic, the outer movements plotted on a bigger scale. With this pairing, Philippe Herreweghe completes his cycle of the symphonies with the orchestra formerly known as the Royal Flemish Philharmonic; Nos 6, 8 and 9 are on Pentatone, the remaining earlier works, like this disc, on his own label (2/16).

The spotlight is very much on the wind instruments here, to the extent in the Second that the strings sound slightly recessed; this matter is resolved when the microphones home in on the smaller orchestra of the Fifth. Herreweghe maintains focus throughout the music, refusing to allow the Second's motivic working to sink into prolixity. His wind soloists make a lovely sound and the rest of the orchestra is clearly well-drilled and alert. The Fifth is, of course, one of the most cherisable of all symphonies and is finely served by these Belgian forces. The Second, too, is well worth hearing once in a while and there can be few better places to start than here. **David Thrasher**

## Shostakovich

Symphony No 6, Op 54. Sinfonietta (String

Quartet No 8), Op 110b (orch Stasevich)

Estonian Festival Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Alpha (F) ALPHA389 (56' • DDD)



Estonia's vexed relationship with Russian power echoes

Shostakovich's unavoidably equivocal world view. The composer spent time in the Baltic seaside resort of Pärnu, then a relatively liberal outpost of the Soviet empire, and Alpha's beautifully designed physical product includes photographic corroboration of his encounter with the Järvins in 1973.

Like his father, Paavo Järvi plainly loves recording, but where Neeme in his prime was intent on transmitting the inner life of a score, Paavo can seem almost excessively sure-footed, as if preoccupied with precisely buffed surfaces. Not so here in a release coinciding with the 100th anniversary of Estonian independence. Since 2011 the peripatetic maestro has touched base at the Pärnu Festival every August, overseeing its evolution into a kind of alternative Lucerne, a summer season for the cream of Estonian musical talent drawing guest players from more venerable European ensembles. The resulting super-group is not huge but its bright clarity, with violins antiphonally placed, does not preclude the plumbing of depths both physical and emotional.

In any event this must be one of the finer Sixths of the digital era. Minor imprecisions present in the closing concert of the 2016 season as captured on film have been eliminated for this audio version (subsequently recorded in whole or in part). Even now, the finale whirls us to its end with articulate ferocity at a tempo almost faster than the players can manage. Vladimir Jurowski, to name one recent rival, is much more symphonically sedate. Closer to Jurowski, and indeed to Neeme, in Shostakovich's great opening *Largo*, Paavo rejects the funereal approach implied by the initial metronome mark, admitting a rare degree of light and shade. I loved the idiosyncratic woodwind solos.

Sadly Abram Stasevich's arrangement of the Eighth String Quartet proves more problematic. However compelling the performance, readers reluctant to embrace the usual string orchestra transcription by Rudolf Barshai will have insurmountable problems with the incursions of timpani. The symphony at least is terrific.

**David Gutman**

*Symphony No 6 – selected comparisons:*

RSNO, N Järvi (4/86) (CHAN) CHAN8411

LPO, Jurowski (11/14) (LPO) LPO 0080

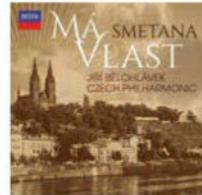
## Smetana

Má vlast

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek

Decca (F) 483 3187DH (77' • DDD)

Recorded live 2014



Omnivorous as Jiří Bělohlávek was in his repertoire choices, his greatest contribution

as a conductor was to the music of his countrymen. So it's fitting that this, the Czech Philharmonic's first album release following Bělohlávek's death last summer, should feature the most proudly Czech work of all: Smetana's *Má vlast*. Taken from performances that Bělohlávek conducted at the Prague Spring Festival in 2014, two years after returning to the orchestra as chief conductor, it's a testament not only to Bělohlávek's skill as an interpreter but also to the way he honed that skill over the course of his long career.

Here is an altogether more assured voice than that showcased on Bělohlávek's 1990 *Má vlast* recording with the same orchestra: warmer, more subtle and more attuned to the capabilities of these outstanding musicians. The flute solos in the first two bars of 'Vltava' are meticulously articulated. The opening brass harmonies of 'Vyšehrad' simply glow. And overall there's a sense of lyrical ease, of a conductor so at home in this idiom that he's prepared to be swept along by the musical tide.

At points, it's a little too genial. 'Šárka' is on the slow side and could do with more of the adrenalin coursing through Colin Davis's white-knuckle rendition with the London Symphony Orchestra, or any one of Rafael Kubelík's recordings. Likewise, for sheer drama Bělohlávek's 'Tábor' has been outmatched in Jakub Hruša's 2016 album with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra.

But Bělohlávek clearly knew that Smetana, far from being a cheap purveyor of catchy melodies and moment-to-moment thrills, was a sure-footed musical architect, and this recording plays the long game. Note how he gradually ramps up the tension in 'Tábor', and manages to make 'Blaník' sound like a genuine culmination of the entire cycle, rather than an afterthought. Note, too, how he marries that sense of

underlying structure with surface detail. Not even Kubelík or Davis bring such spider-silk delicacy to the fugal central section of 'From Bohemia's Meadows and Forests'. It all makes for a satisfying listen, and one very true to Bělohlávek: not a fireworks display but a showcase for sincere, thoughtful and polished musicianship. An appropriate release to be remembered by. **Hannah Nepil**

*Selected comparisons:*

LSO, C Davis (12/05) (LSO) LSO0061 or 0516  
Bamberg SO, Hriška (2/17) (TUDO) TUDOR7196

## Sterndale Bennett

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 74'

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 1;  
No 2, Op 4; No 3, Op 9

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /

Howard Shelley pf

Hyperion (CDA68178 (80' • DDD)



These three concertos were composed in the early 1830s, while Bennett was still a teenager and a student at the RAM. Malcolm Binns recorded them for Lyrita some three decades ago – scintillating performances that captured the music's

youthful élan. Now we have Howard Shelley conducting from the piano in the 74th instalment of Hyperion's seemingly inexhaustible survey of Romantic concertos. And fine as Binns's accounts are, Shelley's are finer still.

Musically, these works display a variety of influences: Mozart, Mendelssohn and the London Piano School (Clementi, Cramer and Bennett's teacher Cipriani Potter). The solo writing is fluent but can veer towards flash and fluff. Binns – sensibly, I think – keeps the music taut and streamlined, executing the glittering passages with classical poise and a minimum of fuss. Shelley is far more daring, savouring and often sculpting the virtuoso flights of fancy – and, in general, elicits a wealth of expressive detail from material that might appear unremarkable on its surface.

He finds poetry in the slow movement of the First Concerto, for instance, particularly in the central section, with its tenderly intimate, chamber music-like interplay at 3'10". In some passages, like the opening volley of the Second Concerto's playful finale, Shelley's playing is so articulate and finely characterised that it has a narrative quality. The Third Concerto was admired by both Mendelssohn and

Schumann. I'll admit it's difficult not to be enticed by the mysteriously atmospheric Romanza, with its delicate pizzicato accompaniment and folksy melodic accent. But this concerto is also the most frankly flamboyant of the three, and what impresses me most in Shelley's interpretation is how he makes the ornamental sound meaningfully expressive.

Truth be told, I approached this release with muted enthusiasm, believing the music to be of sturdy but slender charm. I'm delighted to stand corrected. This generously packed, beautifully recorded disc is – like so many in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series – simply revelatory. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Piano Concertos – selected comparison:*

Binns, LPO, Philharmonic Orch, Braithwaite

(11/90) (LYRI) SRCD204/5 (oas)

## Stravinsky

Capriccio<sup>a</sup>, Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments<sup>b</sup>, Four Études, Op 7, Movements<sup>b</sup>, Piano-Rag-Music, Piano Sonatas – in F sharp minor; 1924. Serenade in A. Tango. Three Movements from Petrushka

Peter Donohoe pf<sup>a</sup> Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra / David Atherton

Somm (SOMMCD266-2 (129' • DDD)

Recorded <sup>a</sup>1995, <sup>b</sup>1999

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**SCHUBERT**  
*'Der Einsame'*  
 Ilker Arcayürek *ten*  
 Simon Lepper *pf*  
 Champs Hill  
 Our reviewer reached for some of the greatest tenors by point of comparison, and Ilker Arcayürek emerged with head held high as an impressive part of an ongoing tradition.

► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2017



**'MUSIC FROM THE PETERHOUSE PARTBOOKS, VOL 5'**  
 Blue Heron /  
 Scott Metcalfe  
 Blue Heron

American choir Blue Heron offer us extremely fine singing on this superb recording of little-heard repertoire from the latter years of Henry VIII.

► REVIEWED IN OCTOBER 2017



**ELGAR**  
*Falstaff. Songs*  
 Roderick Williams *bar* BBC  
 Philharmonic Orchestra /  
 Sir Andrew Davis  
 Chandos

A *Falstaff* full of personality and perceptiveness, Roderick Williams eloquent in orchestral songs ... just the highlights from a fine Elgar anthology.

► REVIEWED IN JANUARY 2018



**'NATURE AND THE SOUL'**  
 Latvian Radio Choir / Kasparis Putniš LMIC/SKANI  
 This is a truly beautiful album of Latvian choral works performed by singers clearly completely immersed in its musical and cultural foundations. A celebration of a country's music not to be missed.

► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2017



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► REVIEWED IN DECEMBER 2017



**KANCHELI. SCHNITTKE**  
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 Erato Alakiozidou *pf*  
 Lutoslawski Quartet  
 Odradek

An excellent disc from the innovative Odradek label, musicianship and sound-quality of very high standard making for a grippingly intense chamber experience.

► REVIEWED IN JANUARY 2018



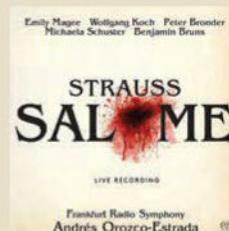
**'CARNEVALE 1729'**  
 Ann Hallenberg *mez*  
 Il Pomo d'Oro / Stefano Montanari *vn*  
 Pentatone  
 Step into Venice in full festive flow as Ann Hallenberg offers arias from seven operas you'd have heard if you were there in 1729: historical research bears fabulous fruits for the ears!

► REVIEWED IN AWARDS 2017



**BEETHOVEN SYMPHONIES 1/3**  
 Symphonies Nos 1 & 3 Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan Wiener Symphoniker An impressive statement of intent from conductor Philippe Jordan as he begins a Beethoven cycle with his Vienna Symphony, on its own record label.

► REVIEWED IN JANUARY 2018

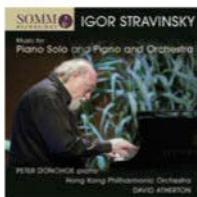


**R STRAUSS**  
*Salome*  
*Sols; Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra / Andrés Orozco-Estrada*  
 Pentatone  
 'A deeply musical account of the score', wrote critic Hugo Shirley of this dramatic telling of Strauss's opera, all recorded and presented in excellent sound.

► REVIEWED IN JANUARY 2018

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Peter Donohoe's rapturous reception at the 1982 Moscow Competition (see his remarkable blog account) was sparked not least by his account of the *Three Movements from Petrushka*, which also featured on one of the first studio recordings for EMI soon thereafter. Those who, like myself, had known his playing since his student days, were not entirely surprised. He had seemingly always been able to swallow the toughest pieces in the repertoire whole, bringing to them a compelling rhythmic energy and, as often as not, an ability to shift into turbo-drive at points where others were struggling. Those qualities remain undimmed, and there could scarcely be a better showcase for them than Stravinsky's solo and concertante works, especially given an additional, if less obvious, temperamental affinity at the level of iconoclastic glee.

The new *Petrushka* Movements have all the dash and drive we have come to expect, notwithstanding one or two unexpected compromises (such as a little extra space for the glissando near the beginning of the 'Danse russe'). Like others before him, though less conspicuously than, say, Gilels, Donohoe allows himself some interventions in the transcription. He reinstates the timpani tattoos linking the three movements, and before the reprise in the 'Shrovetide Fair' he gives us the brief 'Peasant with Bear' episode and an evocative transition out of it, derived from the orchestral original, which actually makes Stravinsky's transcription seem slightly lame at this point.

The early F sharp minor Piano Sonata isn't quite Donohoe's thing; but, given its curious attempt to blend academic solidity and neo-Romantic warmth, it wasn't really Stravinsky's either; whereas the sly subversiveness of the *echt* neoclassical 1924 Sonata has composer and pianist both in their element. For the Serenade and the *Piano-Rag-Music* there are recordings by Stravinsky himself, both made in Paris early in July 1934. In both pieces Donohoe takes slightly more time, in the interests of greater clarity and point. On the other hand, even behind the acoustic vagueness it's possible to detect a degree more unrestrained grandeur from the composer in the Serenade's opening 'Hymn', where Donohoe is perhaps at excessive pains to note the *forte* rather than *fortissimo* marking: the cue for a reading that is,

to me at least, surprisingly mellow. In the Tango Donohoe is deliciously dry and authentically inscrutable; for some reason he omits eight bars from the repeat of the central section. Those looking for the complete solo works might regret the absence of the composer's transcriptions of *Ragtime* and the *Circus-Polka*. But there is so much else to feast on here that it would seem churlish to complain.

The concertante works were recorded in 1995-99 but more than merit their resuscitation. All are superbly crisp and clean, and David Atherton has his Hong Kong orchestra on its toes. Both the Concerto and the Capriccio demonstrate Donohoe's extraordinary ability to inject extra energy just when interest might be in danger of flagging, and the all-round precision in the late *Movements* gives this impenetrable music every chance to speak.

There is a curious glitch in the *Piano-Rag-Music* which sounds for all the world like two takes superimposed (around 1'38"-1'41"); or perhaps it's a trick of reverberation from a single take, because I noticed something similar in the first movement of the Serenade, from around 2'38". But these are isolated moments; otherwise the recording quality is close yet, to my ears, never constricted. **David Fanning**  
*Piano-Rag-Music, Serenade – selected comparison:*  
Stravinsky (EMI) 754607-2

## Wirén

**Symphony No 3, Op 20. Divertimento, Op 29.  
Serenade, Op 11. Sinfonietta, Op 7a  
Iceland Symphony Orchestra / Rumon Gamba  
Chandos**



Completed towards the end of the Second World War, Dag Wirén's Third Symphony acknowledges the starker 'militaristic' modalities of the time while remaining rooted in the more neoclassical sort of Sibelius; woodwind pair off perkily, often in thirds. Its undeniably eclectic quality may momentarily put you in mind of Vaughan Williams during lyrical passages or of Nielsen during climaxes – some are quite dark – but there's certainly enough of a distinctive voice to quell the doubts. Better at hustle and bustle than profundity, Wirén's vaguely Gallic civility holds up until his inflated denouement, pastiche Sibelius in triumphalist mode. In the outer movements Rumon Gamba's interpretation dispenses with some of Thomas Dausgaard's impatient drive and the lovely slow movement is given

more space to bloom on Chandos's ample sound stage.

This is a work Gamba has given in London as well as Reykjavík and there's no mistaking his affection for the idiom: his 70-minute anthology would seem intent on seducing the general collector. Very attractive it is too, even if I would not want to be without the famous analogue recording of the Serenade (1937) by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. With leaner forces Marriner elicits a measured yet snappier account of the finale once associated with a BBC flagship arts programme.

Gamba's other choices, by turns gently motoric and wistful, are pleasant rather than earth-shattering. Neither lasts as long as 20 minutes and the composer's French training discourages a recurrence of hyperbole. The tauter Divertimento, a product of the 1950s, brings no fundamental stylistic evolution. (Even when providing the melody for Sweden's old-school entry in the 1965 Eurovision Song Contest, Wirén crossed Sibelius's *Valse triste* with Prokofiev's *Cinderella*.) In Chandos's trilingual booklet, Gamba explains that he 'wanted to record all the pieces using the large body of a full symphonic string section'. An eminently recommendable disc. **David Gutman**

**Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:**  
Norrköping SO, Dausgaard (12/00) (CPO) CPO999 677-2  
**Serenade – selected comparison:**  
ASMF, Marriner (4/80<sup>8</sup>, 6/14) (DECC) 478 6883DC28  
or (ELOQ) 442 8196

## Xenakis

**Metastaseis A<sup>a</sup>. Nomos gamma<sup>b</sup>. Terretektorb<sup>b</sup>**  
<sup>a</sup>RAI Symphony Orchestra; <sup>b</sup>The Hague Residentie Orchestra / Arturo Tamayo  
Mode



**MODE299 (41' • DDD)**

Iannis Xenakis is another composer to have received Mode's long-term advocacy, and this 15th instalment features a first recording for the original version of his breakthrough piece. The story goes that the composer had tried to interest Hermann Scherchen in several earlier works, with the conductor drawn instead to *Metastaseis* (1954) and agreeing to perform it were various revisions carried out. These were undertaken and the premiere, conducted by Hans Rosbaud, soon established Xenakis as a seminal figure of the European avant-garde.

Over six decades on and *Metastaseis* retains much of its expressive pungency

# GRAMOPHONE Collector

## FROM MAJOR TO MINOR

**David Threasher** immerses himself in the symphonies of composers whose music illuminates the work of their greater contemporaries



You've got Méhul: the Solistes Européens Luxembourg under Christoph König go beyond Beethoven

**B**eing a *Gramophone* critic might be the best job you could have – getting paid to listen to the Finest Music in the World. This handful of discs, though, shows that there's a lot more going on behind that glib description: music that's perfectly fine, even inspired, but isn't going to make it in the canon next to the Mozarts and Haydns, the Beethovens and Schuberts who lived in its milieu and would have known each of the composers here. It also demonstrates that's there's a continuing interest in the music of these secondary characters in the story of music around this time, and that there are record labels which have made it their mission to make it available to us.

First, let's get the elephant in the room out of the way: Beethoven himself, and his *Eroica* Symphony. This performance has the required effect: Christoph König refuses to let it bloat, keeping it brisk but never underselling the import of the music. His Luxembourgeois band may not have the heft or sheen of (say) the BPO but that's not the modern way. More to the point is the coupling: the First Symphony of **Étienne-Nicolas Méhul** (1763–1817). This comes from five years after the *Eroica* but, initially at least, seems to channel the G minor mood of Mozart and Haydn. Méhul, though, was every inch the post-Revolutionary proto-Romantic and this is a symphony that holds the attention, here played live

(with applause) with more fervour, speed and accuracy than the studio recording by Michel Swierczewski and his Gulbenkian forces (Nimbus, 7/89).

The other Romantic in this pile is **Carl Czerny** (1791–1857), a Beethoven pupil who really could churn it out (the *Grande Sinfonie* No 2 on this disc is Op 781). Praise for his gifts has always been somewhat grudging: 'It would be difficult to find a failure of imagination greater than that of Czerny', wrote Schumann. Ouch! The G minor Symphony, called No 6 but without opus number, dates from 1854 and so understandably follows Beethoven and Schumann in its *Sturm und Drang* scramblings but without the indelible memorability of either, despite an obvious ear for orchestral colour: for instance in the wind-dominated *Andante* or a Scherzo that falls just short of the Mendelssohnian fairy lightness it clearly craves. Op 781 in D goes more clearly for Beethovenian grandeur: there are traces of Beethoven's Second throughout the first movement; of the Eighth in the tick-tock *Andantino grazioso*; of the Ninth in the Scherzo; and a straight crib from, of all places, the second-movement *Allegro* of Haydn's Symphony No 11 in the finale. Good work, nevertheless, from Grzegorz Nowak and his Kaiserslautern forces (reissued from a 2006 Hänsler Classic disc); although Czerny remains a

composer whose undeniable talent is in inverse proportion to his capacity for originality.

Back to the 18th century and a trio of sets from the Osnabrück label CPO. Twelve three-movement symphonies by **Carl Friedrich Abel** (1723–87) – a colleague of JC Bach in London and an early influence on Mozart – last 6–10 minutes and are in the *galant* style of the age, more concerned in their faster music with orchestral sound effects, more melodic, if tersely so, in the slow movements, and finales generally following the hunt. There's not much opportunity with only oboes, horns and strings (with harpsichord) for variety of sound; but given they date from the first half of the 1760s one wouldn't expect any different. Michael Alexander Willens and his Kölner Akademie know the music of this period well and give it performances as fine as you could wish, with especially bold horns.

**Johann Evangelist Brandl** (1760–1837), who hasn't made it as far as *The New Grove*, was a violinist who spent most of his career in his native Germany but was still affected by Revolutionary matters during his thirties. His E flat Symphony breathes the air of 1770s/80s Haydn and Mozart, with sprinklings of *Sturm und Drang* and a personal approach to chromatic inflection. The D major, his last symphony, published in 1803, pushes this further, with a dramatic slow introduction bearing similarities to the overtures to *Don Giovanni* and, I fancy, *William Tell*. An austere *Andante* is followed by a Beethovenian *Menuetto scherzoso* and a woodwind-dominated finale. Kevin Griffiths and his Ludwigshafen band make a decent case for a composer of whom it would be fascinating to hear more.

Howard Griffiths turns out to be Kevin's father and is a well-known name on CPO championing these *Kleinmeister*. His latest is a disc of symphonies with the Svizzera Italiana Orchestra by **Franz Krommer** (1759–1831), dating from the early 1820s. One of these (Op 102 in C minor) is shared by a disc from Matthias Bamert and the London Mozart Players (Chandos, 7/94) but is deserving of this revisit in a performance that is brisker, alive to its febrile unease, marrying the influence of Mozart and Haydn with the energy of Beethoven before its perky major-key finale. The G minor is similar, its first-movement *Allegro* especially putting me in mind of Haydn's *Hen* Symphony (*sans clucking*),

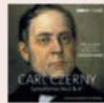
just as the openings of the outer movements of the E flat, Op 105, imitate Mozart's K543 to the life before breaking into something respectively more majestic and festive. Even if the Minuet has clearly wandered in from Haydn's No 99 in the same key, there's more to this music than simply a game of spot-the-influence. In amalgamating the styles of the composers whose music he knew, Krommer nevertheless comes up with something that displays his individual character.

Griffiths *père* also conducts a disc pairing concertos by **Franz Danzi** (1763–1826), moving from Lugano to Munich and from CPO to Sony Classical, another label investing in the music of this period. Perhaps best known for his woodwind music, Danzi was nonetheless a cellist, and one with a fondness for the instrument's lyrical qualities, if his E minor Concerto (1809; one of three for the instrument) is anything to go by. Lowering, Beethovenian orchestral colours yield to the sweetness of the cello line in the *Allegro*, while the *Larghetto* is a lovely song without words and the finale an *Allegretto* that demonstrates the cello's playful qualities across the range. Danzi's sole Piano Concerto (1799) builds on the Mozartian model albeit – despite a beautiful slow movement – without the emotional depth. Aurélien Pascal and Nareh Arghamanyan are the soloists, backed to the hilt by Griffiths and the Munich CO, revealing another composer who is the sum of his parts and perhaps just a little more. 

## THE RECORDINGS



**Beethoven. Méhul** Symphonies  
Sols Européens / Christoph König  
Rubicon RCD1020



**Czerny** Two Symphonies  
SWR Rad Orch / Grzegorz Nowak  
SWR Music SWR19419CD



**Abel** Symphonies, Opp 1 & 4  
Cologne Academy / MA Willens  
CPO 2 CPO555 137-2



**Brandl** Two Symphonies  
German St Philh / Kevin Griffiths  
CPO CPO555 157-2



**Krommer** Three Symphonies  
Svizzera Ital Orch / Howard Griffiths  
CPO CPO555 125-2



**Danzi** Two Concertos  
Sols; Munich CO / Howard Griffiths  
Sony Classical 88985 36108-2

and visceral immediacy. This 'A' version differs most audibly in terms of string textures evincing the last vestige of Romantic-era richness such as would hardly have escaped notice from Xenakis's modernist contemporaries. Heard today, however, it stands as a fascinating if raw statement of intent by a composer needing only to take that final step towards stylistic maturity. Hence *Terretektorb* (1966) and *Nomos gamma* (1968), which find Xenakis at his most uninhibited. Here musicians are dispersed among the audience in what are early examples of immersive music-making, without need of electronic means. Their physical impact remains undimmed, with the former's crackling percussive continuum finding contrast in the latter's onslaught of drums in music whose methodical precision is outweighed by its ritualistic savagery.

Such is the impression conveyed by these performances, in which only a slightly confined balance can be faulted. Alternatives are not numerous: Mario Venzago has already recorded the revision of *Metastasis* on his fifth volume of Xenakis's orchestral music (*Timpani*), while Charles Bruck's performances of the other pieces (Edition RZ, 9/71) is of largely historical value. The present disc is enhanced by detailed annotations from Ron Squibbs, a pleasure in themselves.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Inspiration'

**Casals Sardana**<sup>a</sup>. El cant dels ocells<sup>b</sup>  
**Cohen Hallelujah**<sup>c</sup> **Hadar Evening of Roses**<sup>d</sup>  
**Offenbach Les larmes de Jacqueline**,  
Op 76 No 1<sup>e</sup> **Marley** No woman, no cry  
**Saint-Saëns Carnaval des animaux - Le cygne**<sup>f</sup>  
**Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107**<sup>g</sup>.  
The Gadfly, Op 97a - Nocturne<sup>h</sup>  
**Sheku Kanneh-Mason** vc with <sup>i</sup>Oliver James <sup>j</sup>  
**Didier Osindero** vn <sup>k</sup>Alinka Rowe va <sup>l</sup>Guy  
**Johnston, Yong Jun Lee** vc <sup>m</sup>Katherine Thomas <sup>n</sup>  
**City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra**  
<sup>abdf</sup>**Cellos** / <sup>o</sup>**Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla**  
Decca 483 2948 (64' • DDD)



It's easy to forget that aside from being a great composer of

operettas, Jacques Offenbach was also a virtuoso cellist. On a recent DG CD (see page 35) Camille Thomas treated us to his rarely heard *Introduction, prière et boléro* and here the 2016 BBC Young Musician of the Year Sheku Kanneh-Mason offers us 'Les larmes de Jacqueline' ('Jacqueline's Tears')

from the cello suite *Harmonies des bois*, as arranged by Werner Thomas-Mifune. Kanneh-Mason's performance is 'a tribute to the inspiration that [Jacqueline] du Pré was for me'. The playing here, disarmingly gentle yet tonally seductive, has a songful use of vibrato that recalls the expressive manners of Pierre Fournier and du Pré herself. These are among Sheku Kanneh-Mason's most personable qualities, not forgetting a sense of intimacy that wins especially high dividends on tracks that involve the CBSO cellos. Another boon is the featured 1610 Amati cello, warmly captured by Decca's engineers, especially on the CD's opening tracks, 'Evening of Roses' (a Jewish folk song), 'The Swan' and *Song of the Birds*, as well as other shorter pieces.

So far I've mentioned, or alluded to, the influences of and tributes to du Pré and Casals, but the programme's repertory centrepiece honours a great cellist lost to us rather more recently. Mstislav Rostropovich was indelibly associated with the music of Shostakovich, especially the First Cello Concerto, which in this context was recorded live and features the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, a conductor who evidently prompts her players to listen to each other.

Jessica Duchen's excellent booklet interview finds Sheku commanding Gražinytė-Tyla for bringing the best out in each player, and the overall impression is of energetic dialogue and a performance that in its overall profile is marginally more relaxed and certainly more chamber-like than those we already have featuring, for example, Rostropovich himself and Alisa Weilerstein. Gražinytė-Tyla has a keen ear for detail – I'd love to hear her tackle Shostakovich's Fourth and Fifteenth Symphonies – and the musical bonding between her, Kanneh-Mason and the orchestra is deeply satisfying, though the temple-throbbing rage that Rostropovich and Svetlanov in particular bring to the concerto's first movement is traded for something altogether less intense. The second movement is the performance's undoubtedly highlight.

A most rewarding CD then, sure evidence that we should henceforth be on the lookout for any performances, either recorded or live, that involve Sheku Kanneh-Mason. How about the Brahms cello sonatas for starters, maybe with Nicholas Angelich? That could be quite something. **Rob Cowan**

# Schubert's Winterreise

The tenor Mark Padmore talks to Richard Wigmore about the spine-chilling song-cycle

Franz Schubert's friends were understandably baffled when, in the spring of 1827, he played and sang through what he dubbed 'a cycle of spine-chilling songs'. The worldly Franz von Schober doubtless spoke for many when he said he liked only 'Der Lindenbaum', the most obviously tuneful of the cycle. Schubert was unfazed. 'I like these songs better than any others, and you will come to like them too.'

Prophetic words. Today 'Der Lindenbaum' is sung by every German schoolchild. For Mark Padmore, whose *Winterreise* with fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout is just released on Harmonia Mundi, it is one of the cycle's pivotal songs. 'It's the most folklike, it's got a beautiful tune, it was a Richard Tauber favourite. But it's much more than a song of nostalgia. Like "Träneregen" from *Die schöne Müllerin*, "Lindenbaum" is a lure to suicide. I hear the line "Komm her zu mir, Geselle" as an enticement to the wanderer to hang himself.'

Yet unlike the wayfarer in Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, Schubert's protagonist does not find release in death beneath the linden tree. 'He avoids suicide, and can't find death even in the cemetery of "Das Wirtshaus". He just carries on, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, or Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days*. *Winterreise* was a favourite work of Beckett's; and there's something very Beckettian in its grim stoicism.'

Padmore is quick to point out that the fortepiano – a restored Graf built around 1830 – creates colours impossible to replicate on a Steinway. 'The modern concert grand is like a Rolls-Royce. What you get from the fortepiano, with its sharp contrast of register, is a variety and strangeness of sound. The keyboard is, of course, an equal protagonist in *Winterreise*. And it comes more into focus when you hear things that are strange. When the wind blows in "Der Lindenbaum", the fortepiano rattles and buzzes percussively in the bass register – a very different sonority from the modern piano. Elsewhere in this song Kris creates a veiled, misty effect by using the moderator pedal.'

We turn our scores of *Winterreise* – Padmore's heavily annotated – back to the opening 'Gute Nacht', headed in Schubert's autograph *Mässig, in gehender Bewegung* ('Moderately, in walking motion'). 'The whole song is built on repeated notes, an inexorable quaver movement that you also get in No 20, "Der Wegweiser". The piano seems to be pushing the wanderer out, without let-up over six minutes.



'Equal protagonists': Mark Padmore (left) with fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout

If you take it too slowly you immediately lose the audience – and you have a 75-minute journey ahead of you! This is almost the only song in the first half of the cycle where an event happens: the passing of the girl's door, the final closing of the gate. Thereafter you have images and memory, but no action.

'In "Gute Nacht" you're immediately struck by the bare open fifths in the bass, D and A, which will also feature in several later songs: say in "Rast", No 10, or "Einsamkeit", No 12, which Schubert originally composed in D minor, rounding off the original cycle of 12 songs in the same key in which it began. In "Der Lindenbaum" the open fifth – B and F sharp – evokes a horn call. And we hear those same two notes in "Irrlicht", No 9, and throughout the final "Leiermann".'

'Irrlicht' is another pivotal song for Padmore, with the fortepiano again enhancing the music's strangeness. 'The unharmonised falling fourths at the opening are an example of Schubert daring to take away almost everything. I always think that he is at his most interesting when he does the least. As in "Pause" from *Schöne Müllerin*, he dares to do "stuckness" in "Irrlicht". The wanderer is not quite Lear on the heath, but he's been alone too long, he's exhausted, his mind is tottering, like a will-o'-the-wisp. Significantly, too, this one of three

songs, with "Die Krähe" and "Letzte Hoffnung", that end with "Grab" ("Grave").

For Padmore the nadir of the whole cycle is No 11, 'Frühlingstraum', where the dream of spring evoked in a folksong is shattered by the screeching cockerel and ravens. Then in the final section, dream and illusion mingle with ironic self-awareness. 'The song's contrasts are even sharper with the percussiveness of the fortepiano. When the bare octaves in the piano postlude fade away to a shattering spread chord of A minor, we reach the ultimate, inescapable bleakness.'

The second half of *Winterreise* is kick-started with 'Die Post'; and from here onwards the journey becomes increasingly inward, a dark night of the soul punctured by moments of defiance, self-mockery, even gallows humour. 'Irony comes more to the fore in the second part'. In "Die Post" the major-minor contrasts so crucial to *Winterreise* are at their bluntest. He asks his heart why it beats so strangely. But he doesn't want to know. The girl doesn't love him, she's with someone else. He's being brutal to himself here.

**'Schubert faces mortality in *Winterreise*. Yet he's daring to stare death in the face and not succumb'** – Mark Padmore

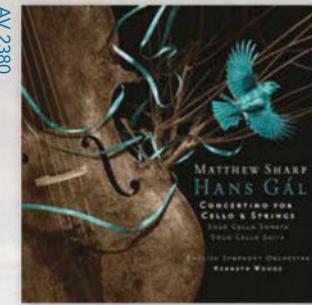
'And the next song, "Der greise Kopf", is a black comedy, with a sense of Beckettian absurdity. I love the rising keyboard scale at "Wie weit noch bis zur Bahre" – 'How far it is still to the grave'. You see here that Schubert marks it with a slur. But I don't think of it as going forward. It denotes huge effort, with a stress on "weit". And it underlines that the performers have to work so hard in *Winterreise* to avoid any hint of the facile. It's tough, it requires attitude, unpicking, and should make an audience uncomfortable!'

The wanderer is at his most disorientated in No 16, 'Letzte Hoffnung', where the very look of the notes on the page evoke his state of mind. 'It should sound like modern music. We don't know where we are, the accents are all in the wrong place. I always say to the pianist "try and put me off". Then in "Der Wegweiser" [No 20] the wanderer starkly confronts death, in repeated monotone Gs - "Einen Weiser seh ich stehen" – against a chromatic bass line. Schubert faces mortality in *Winterreise*. Yet he's daring to stare death in the face and not succumb.'

In the final song the wanderer finally makes desultory contact with another human being, a tottering figure condemned to grind out snatches of melody, almost non-melody. In the opening two bars a crushed 'grace note' precedes each of the pianist's hollow open fifths. Taking his cue from Schubert's autograph, and his 2010 *Gramophone* Award-winning recording of *Winterreise* with Paul Lewis, Padmore encouraged Bezuidenhout to play the crushed notes throughout the song. 'You're evoking a man on the street playing a clapped out instrument badly. I'm convinced these crushed notes are more than warming up. I want people to be irritated by every catch in the music, every bit of awkwardness. Because essentially that's what's going in. It's not a closure, it's something circular, with nothing reconciling or companionable. These are not two friends. The Leiermann is an outsider. It could be *L'Etranger*. Schubert's vision here is as existentially bleak, and as comfortless, as Camus.' **G**

► To read Hugo Shirley's review of *Winterreise* turn to page 78

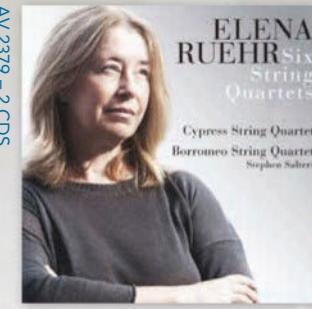
## A New Releases



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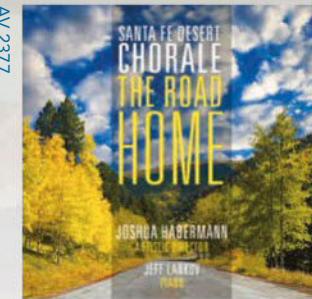
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# Chamber



David Threasher revels in joyous accounts of Mozart's serenades:

*'The period horns form the backbone to the sound, chattering, clattering and choriling as well as providing sustaining power'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**



Tim Ashley enjoys Schumann from the oboe of Céline Moinet:

*'The Op 94 Romances receive an exquisite performance, understated, subtle and quite wonderfully refined'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**

## Adès

Arcadiana, Op 12. The Four Quarters, Op 28.

Piano Quintet\*

\*Dimitri Vassilakis pf DoelenKwartet Rotterdam

Cybèle F 261603 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Adès's first string quartet, *Arcadiana* (1994), was premiered a year before *Powder Her Face*. That this is its sixth recording since then (by my count) shows just how successful it is in fusing contemporary sonority, formal familiarity and imaginative depth. The Dutch DoelenKwartet present the work as a journey, with beginning, middle and end. Over seven brief movements a range of maritime emotional states, breezy to brooding, reminiscing to remonstrating, pass by. Emerging from glistening harmonics, the quiet monophonic conclusion of the anti-finale, 'Lethe', is full of pathos; the Elgar-alluding 'O Albion' movement, though, can't be saved from a certain over-sentimentality.

In the Piano Quintet (2000) episodic contrast is eschewed for the development of two contrasting themes in a continuous sonata texture. Despite the traditional starting point, there is nothing academic or furrow-browed here. Lively, tuneful, at times ironic and extravagant – is there a dash of Gerald Barry in the obsessive scalar repetitions, abrupt contrasts and wrangled tonality? – the quintet displays striking ingenuity. The dynamic range of the DoelenKwartet and Dimitri Vassilakis's reading makes it consistently captivating.

Adès's second string quartet, *The Four Quarters* (2010), is markedly more mature than *Arcadiana* – more expansive in process, less focused on fleeting gestures (even if its more excitable moments are too measured for my liking). The DoelenKwartet handle *The Four Quarters* with poise and balance, and the work's classicism is accentuated in the DoelenKwartet's combination of warm tone and technical precision. The pizzicato counterpoint of the second movement,

'Morning Dew', feels raw without being rough. The ethereal false harmonics in the closing movement, 'The Twenty-fifth Hour', are sprightly to the point of dizziness. The titular quarters refer to Corot's four times of the day; the piece would make an intriguing partner to Cage's four seasons-based *String Quartet in Four Parts*.

This same string quartet programme has previously been recorded by the Calder Quartet (Signum, 7/15). If the performances are evenly matched, the DoelenKwartet disc is the clear winner for its sound quality, the lucent SACD allowing for appreciation of new details at each listen. **Liam Cagney**

## JS Bach

Six Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord,

BWV1014-1019

Isabelle Faust vn Kristian Bezuidenhout hpd

Harmonia Mundi M ② HMM90 2256/7 (148' • DDD)



Confession time: I first encountered Bach's sonatas for violin and keyboard when I heard Yehudi Menuhin soaring deliciously above the plodding harpsichord of George Malcolm and the apprehensive gamba-playing of Ambrose Gauntlett. At least that was the slow movements; in the faster ones Malcolm suddenly came back to life, while Menuhin became less secure.

This is perhaps why it took me a long time to love these sonatas – a reminder of how much recordings can shape our view of repertoire we don't know. So if someone discovered these pieces through this new set from Isabelle Faust and Kristian Bezuidenhout I like to think they'd be instantly won over by the music. The harpsichord is a fabulous copy by John Phillips after a Johann Heinrich Gräbner instrument loaned to Bezuidenhout by Trevor Pinnock. And Faust has borrowed an equally characterful Jacobus Stainer violin from 1658 which, as Bezuidenhout puts it in his fascinating essay, 'has the

necessary brilliance to cut through some of the more sumptuous keyboard textures'.

Faust and Bezuidenhout played these sonatas a lot in concert before taking them into the studio and it shows – both in the detail and the trust that allows for real risk-taking. Sample the Fourth Sonata, for instance. Faust's dynamic phrasing of the held notes in the second-movement *Allegro* gives the line great character, Bezuidenhout seeming to breathe with her, while the finale is full of sparkle and energy but never breathless, the ornamentation sounding entirely inevitable. Something as simple as a sustained note (the opening movement of the Fifth Sonata) is exquisitely coloured and Faust's double-stopping in the third-movement *Adagio* has a wondrously confiding quality.

In the opening of the First Sonata, Bezuidenhout is so beguiling that you hardly notice Faust stealing in, *pianissimo*. Her subtlety is matched by Rachel Podger with Trevor Pinnock, though Faust finds an even greater plasticity of line which is very winning. The fantasy of the opening *Adagio* of No 3 is also alluring on this new set. Once you add a viola da gamba to the mix, the balance changes and you're less aware of the violin; and while Manze is always compelling intellectually sometimes I found his tempos a little staid (for instance in the finale of the now gamba-less First Sonata). Richard Tognetti is a wonderfully creative player but the switching between harpsichord and organ even within sonatas is somewhat eccentric. Faust and Bezuidenhout bring these sonatas alive without recourse to gimmickry – sample the joyous closing movement of the Third Sonata.

Can I find fault with this set? No, I cannot. It's an eloquent and beautifully recorded homage to the composer and demands to be in the collection of all Bach lovers post-haste. **Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Manze, Egarr, ter Linden*

(3/00) (HARM) HMU90 7250/51

*Podger, Pinnock* (2/01) (CHCL) CCS14798

*Tognetti, Peres da Costa, Yeadon*

(4/07) (ABC) ABC476 5942



Ottavio Dantone and Accademia Bizantina present Bach's Art of Fugue as a work of living Baroque music rather than a museum piece

## JS Bach

Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080

Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone

Decca © 483 2329DH (77' • DDD)



In his booklet note Ottavio Dantone pays the usual tributes to the awesome

compositional achievement of *The Art of Fugue* but warns against 'failing to search out the sweet emotions hidden within ... and not doing justice to Bach's superhuman work, an unparalleled synthesis of art and science, expressive intensity and intellect'. Like Reinhard Goebel (Archiv, 6/85) and Rachel Podger (Channel Classics, 10/16), he wants to present it as a work of living Baroque music rather than a museum piece for handling with kid gloves or a concept-work to be rendered as uniformly as possible.

Thus, for instance, while Accademia Bizantina here consist only of baroque string quartet, harpsichord and organ, we get colour variations ranging through strings doubled by organ, strings with harpsichord or organ continuo, solo harpsichord (Dantone) or organ (Stefano Demichelo) as well as the two in duet,

violin and harpsichord, and violin and cello. Sometimes more than one of these combinations appears within a fugue. And although these choices often seem to have been made along structural lines (to demarcate the sections of a double or triple fugue, highlight subject entries or help delineate an unwinding canon), the results are always pleasing in themselves: the organ's tootling brings an archaic air, the harpsichord stealthy precision, and the strings firm but shapely phrasing.

Dantone has other ways of maintaining variety and stressing the work's human side, however. Every fugue is treated on its own stylistic terms, so that Contrapunctus 6 really is 'im Stile francese' complete with wispy appoggiaturas and other ornaments, 11 is an endearingly lumbering dance, the strings lift and lilt in 12 (Rectus), the solo harpsichord in Canon per augmentationum in contrario motu is unexpectedly expressive, and the organ at the end of the Canon alla decima is permitted a bold cadenza.

The final fugue is left in its uncompleted state, though in accordance with Dantone's feeling that this was Bach's choice the big moment is not so much a dramatic leap into the void as a hasty rise from the workdesk – an arresting way to end a well thought-out and executed recording.

Lindsay Kemp

## Beethoven · Hiller · Schubert

Beethoven Piano Trio No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1

Hiller Piano Trio No 6 in C minor, 'Serenade No 2', Op 186 Schubert Notturno, D897

Rautio Piano Trio

Resonus © RES10203 (58' • DDD)

## Beethoven · Brahms · Takemitsu

Beethoven Piano Trio No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1

Brahms Piano Trio No 3, Op 101

Takemitsu Between Tides

İsimşiz Trio

Rubicon © RCD1013 (66' • DDD)



The Rautio Piano Trio played Mozart on period instruments for their Resonus debut (9/16). Here, in a programme of Beethoven, Hiller and Schubert, they employ modern instruments, although these new interpretations display strikingly similar qualities of classical poise, deftness and textural clarity. The Rautio's approach is a godsend in Ferdinand Hiller's Sixth Trio (1879), as their seemingly unflappable grace helps mitigate the

music's rather prosaic rhetoric. His vaguely Schumann-esque melodies are unmemorable and often appear to be developed in a manner akin to pure rote. Nevertheless, Hiller was a significant musical figure in his day, and this premiere recording of the Trio is worth a listen even if the music itself has little of the charm or imaginativeness one finds in the works of, say, Reinecke, Rheinberger or Herzogenberg.

The Rautio's delicate, easy-flowing performance of Schubert's *Notturno* is lovely, if not quite as magically rapt as the version by Frank Braley and the Capuçon brothers (Erato, 6/07). There are delights in Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio, too – at the end of the first-movement exposition (starting at 1'13"), for instance, where the players seem to be scurrying nimbly on tiptoe, and in the elegantly effervescent finale. At times, however, the performance is simply too tidy, as if the Rautio set out to smooth over the music's wrinkles and furrows. The famously eerie *Largo*, for example, is fleet and crisp, generating visceral excitement but failing to capture the movement's peculiar sense of emotional agitation and unease.

The Trio Isimsiz are punctilious, too, but in a starkly different way; where the Rautio draw with an extra-fine nib, the Isimsiz etch in bold lines. They take the *Largo* of the *Ghost* Trio at a relatively glacial pace, turning the many arpeggios and runs into icy, jagged figures. There are a few faint glimmers of warmth in the frosty gloom they evoke, but the overall effect is aptly chilling.

In Brahms's C minor Trio the Isimsiz are impressively single-minded. They seize upon the music's choppy phraseology, creating an unexpected tension between the grand, granitic textures and gasping disquiet of the melodies themselves. The players have a lighter touch where it's required, mind you – note the *grazioso* svelteness of both the Scherzo and the intermezzo-like third movement – but the feeling of breathlessness is almost always inescapable.

The Ensemble Kai find an aching nostalgia in their 1993 BIS recording of Tōru Takemitsu's *Between Tides*, with strong echoes of Ravel and Messiaen; the Trio Isimsiz make it sound considerably more modern. In the Isimsiz's hands, the melodic fragments fit together like an exquisite mosaic, and the listener feels one's way across its glistening, mesmeric surface.

All in all, this is an outstanding debut disc by the Trio Isimsiz, whose unusually thoughtful interpretations are presented with dazzling technical mastery.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Borodin · Dvořák · Tchaikovsky

**Borodin String Quartet No 2 Dvořák String**

Quartet No 12, 'American', Op 96 B179

**Tchaikovsky String Quartet No 1, Op 11**

**Escher Quartet**

BIS F BIS2280 (81' • DDD/DSD)



I didn't think they still made discs like this – three of the best-loved Romantic string

quartets, grouped together for no other reason, presumably, than that they're all popular. And, of course, that they're all masterpieces. Someone will always be discovering these works for the first time and there's no musical reason why they should ever feel any less fresh.

No worries on that score from the Escher Quartet. BIS has provided a recorded sound with just enough bloom to create an atmosphere, but sufficiently transparent that the inner parts are always lucid. And the Eschers have run with it – 'run' being the operative word, because they approach this music as if it's newly minted. Their readings are clear, intelligent and bracingly energetic.

Indeed, it's tempting to talk about varnish being stripped away, and there's something undeniably satisfying about the rhythmic kick that viola player Pierre Lapointe gives to the opening melody of the *American* Quartet, or the crunch of horsehair on wood in Tchaikovsky's Scherzo. The finales of both the Dvořák and the Borodin are electrifying. But the way the Eschers probe the different layers of melancholy in the first movement of the Dvořák and the eloquent, plain-spoken way they lay out the famous melody of Tchaikovsky's *Andante cantabile* are typical of performances that take nothing for granted.

Reservations? Well, with this degree of objectivity, you do lose some of the music's sensual warmth: the shimmering passage in Borodin's 'Notturno' that Andrew Porter once compared to Chopin comes across like an (admittedly exquisite) clockwork mechanism. But this is a disc to revive jaded palates, and a highly rewarding example of the state of the art in 21st-century quartet-playing.

**Richard Bratby**

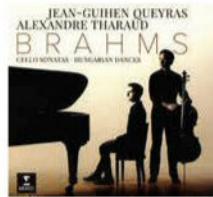
## Brahms

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99.

Six Hungarian Dances

**Jean-Guihen Queyras vc Alexandre Tharaud pf**

Erato F 9029 57239-3 (72' • DDD)



The late Joan Chissell, reviewing Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel

Barenboim's recording of the two Brahms sonatas (EMI, 12/68), said she felt torn in half. 'On the one hand their playing is quite extraordinarily expressive and beautiful. On the other, it is self-indulgent enough in rhythm and tempo to be un-Brahmsian.' Chissell softened over the years, enthusing over Claude Starck and Christoph Eschenbach's 'seductive yieldings' (Claves, 4/91), and I believe she would have praised these new interpretations by Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexandre Tharaud, too, for displaying a similar balance of 'malleability' and 'continuity of line'.

The sense of ease with which Queyras and Tharaud play with tempo is particularly impressive, in fact. They can be quite elastic, slowing down significantly for the coda of the E minor Sonata's first movement, for example, to give the music a poignant, crepuscular effect. This is managed with utter naturalness, so it not only makes sense but sounds right. In the first movement of the F major Sonata, they quite subtly bend and shape the rhythms, heightening the feeling of passionate yearning – listen, for instance, to the sense of improvisatory freedom beginning at 1'02".

Not all Queyras and Tharaud's musical decisions are wholly convincing. They move awkwardly in the *Allegretto quasi menuetto* of Op 38 – like a couple whose attempts at graceful dancing are impeded by overly starched clothing – while the finale is a shade fast, more two-beats-to-a-bar than four, and almost loses its balance on occasion. I also wish they'd observe the *mezza voce* markings in the third movement of Op 99, as indicated; Starck and Eschenbach demonstrate how these dynamic shadings enhance the drama. On the other hand, they make the *Adagio affettuoso* of the Second Sonata into something like a spiritual journey of the heart.

The recording pushes the piano to the back of the sound stage. It's not the most natural balance, admittedly, but it allows us to savour the cellist's soft-grained tone and expressive attention to detail. The duo's arrangement of six of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* – played with elegantly plonked dollops of schmaltz and a joyous revelling in virtuosic display – makes this disc pretty much irresistible.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Dvořák

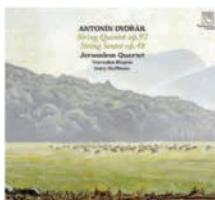
String Quintet No 3, 'American', Op 97 B180<sup>a</sup>.

String Sextet, Op 48 B80<sup>b</sup>

**Jerusalem Quartet** with

<sup>a</sup>Veronika Hagen va <sup>b</sup>Gary Hoffman vc

Harmonia Mundi ® HMM90 2320 (67' • DDD)



'I always have the feeling that people don't admire this piece enough', said

Johannes Brahms of Dvořák's String Sextet. I'll second that, and not just on account of the 'wonderful invention, freshness, and beauty of sound' that Brahms rightly praised. There's something irresistible about the liveliness, generosity and sheer warmth of Dvořák's Sextet. In a word, it's lovable, a quality it shares with its coupling on this new Harmonia Mundi disc from the Jerusalem Quartet, the String Quintet in E flat.

And these are warm, generous performances. On previous encounters with the Jerusalem Quartet I've sometimes felt that the sheer finesse of their playing inhibited their expression. Not here, although the Jerusalems – plus two extremely distinguished guests, Veronika Hagen and Gary Hoffman – certainly take

Dvořák seriously. I wondered at first if their approach to the outer movements of the Sextet wasn't a little too serious, emphasising lyricism and symphonic cohesion at the expense of spontaneity.

But then there are details like the rhythmic bounce they give to the second subject of the Sextet's first movement and the hushed, wondrous moment of collective stillness they find immediately before the exposition repeat. The disc is full of such moments (they have a lovely way of shading off the end of a phrase, particularly effective in the Quintet's third-movement Variations); there's humour as well as sensitivity at work here (savour the crispness of Hagen's second-violin drumbeat at the start of the Quintet's Scherzo) and in the Quintet, particularly, there's always a keen sense of forward momentum. These are beautiful, affectionate performances, captured in lifelike sound, and if there's any justice they'll win many new admirers for these glorious but still underrated works. **Richard Bratby**

## Franck · Poulenc · Strohl · Tombelle

**Franck Cello (Violin) Sonata** **Poulenc** Cello

Sonata. **Souvenirs** **Strohl** Titus et Bérénice

**Tombelle** Andante espressivo

**Edgar Moreau** vc **David Kadouch** pf

Erato ® ② 9029 57406-2 (96' • DDD)



There's a nice feel of continuity and development to this two-disc celebration of the 19th-century French cello school from the young French cellist Edgar Moreau. His championing of under- and unrecorded repertoire continues with him giving the same treatment here, for instance, to Rita Strohl and Fernand de la Tombelle that he gave to Platti and Graziani on his 'Giovincello' disc of 18th-century cello concertos (12/15). This is also his first recital recording since his debut of musical shorts, 'Play' (6/14), meaning we get to hear how he fashions a programme of weightier musical fare.

It's a fantastic programme, too. From a lesser-spotted repertoire perspective, Strohl's *Titus et Bérénice* sonata is a cracker with its 35-minute, four-movement dramatic depiction of the ancient Roman tale. De la Tombelle's gentle *Andante espressivo*, meanwhile, is as exquisite as it is brief, as is the disc's premiere recording, Poulenc's poignant miniature *Souvenirs*, which was published posthumously only in 2014 having been rediscovered.

**Tickets from £9.50\***

\*A £3.00 booking fee will be applied to all ticket bookings. Fees do not apply to bookings or ticket collections made in person at the Box Office.

## MARCH AND APRIL HIGHLIGHTS

### FRI 2 MAR

Dame Evelyn Glennie  
& O/Modernt Quartet  
Janáček, Beethoven,  
Purcell & more

### WED 28 MAR

Rachel Podger & VOCES8  
Biber, Mendelssohn,  
Rachmaninov, Monteverdi

### THU 29 MAR

Vertavo Quartet  
with Lawrence Power  
& Simon Crawford-Phillips  
Turina, Ravel, Chausson

### SAT 7 APR

Aurora Orchestra  
with Charles Owen  
& Mark Stone  
Mozart's Piano

### SAT 14 APR

Martin Feinstein & friends  
The Brandenburg  
Concertos No. 1-6  
Part of Bach Weekend

### SUN 29 APR

Alina Ibragimova's  
Chiaroscuro Quartet  
Bach, Beethoven, Schubert

**'Alina Ibragimova is one of the most richly talented and expressive of violinists... she instinctively finds the essence of the music and delivers it with grace.'**

*Guardian*

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Alina Ibragimova © Eva Vermandel

Still, the great thing we're learning about Moreau in the recording studio is that, while under-recorded repertoire has been something of a calling card thus far, ultimately this is just the icing on an overall story of a cellist whose recordings are worth hearing whatever he's playing. Take *Titus et Bérénice*, where he manages to capture its Parisian *grand opéra*-esque ardor with beautiful chamber intimacy. Likewise, his Poulenc and Franck sonatas stand out for their subtlety and poise. Also to be enjoyed are his exquisitely barely-there *pianissimos* and his glowing tone.

It's also a pleasure to hear Moreau in a sustained programme of emotionally meaty, slower-tempo works. On stage he's shown himself to be an eager virtuoso, and in fact 'Giovincello' featured the most dizzyingly fast third movement of Haydn's First Cello Concerto I've ever heard. Here though, in pyrotechnics-free repertoire relying entirely on the artist's ability to convey poetry, we can really appreciate his ability to sustain *cantabile* lines, to craft musical arguments and indeed to employ all that finger agility towards both overall stylishness and magical moments such as the delicate flutterings of the Poulenc Sonata's 'Ballabile'.

The partnership with Kadouch is also a fine thing, the two of them clearly singing from the same hymn sheet. The beginnings of a partnership akin to Erato's longstanding cello-pianist team, Gautier Capuçon and Frank Braley, perhaps? Who knows. What I can say with confidence is that this is a standout album.

**Charlotte Gardner**

## Franck

String Quartet. Piano Quintet, Op 14<sup>a</sup>

**Paavali Jumppanen pf** Danel Quartet

CPO (F) CPO555 088-2 (77' • DDD)



These performances by the Quatuor Danel are deftly poised on a knife's edge between sensuousness and rigour, as the most memorable interpretations of Franck's music so often are (cf Monteux's Chicago recording of the D minor Symphony). Indeed, something about the opening few minutes of the String Quartet – the incisive attacks and sonorous yet sinewy tone – reminds me of the Borodin Quartet in its 1960s line-up with Dubinsky, Alexandrov, Shebalin and Berlinsky. There's the Danel's careful attention to texture, too: note the way the three lower

strings neatly glue their chords together so that every note is sustained for its full value, just the way Franck asked for it in marking the passage *molto sostenuto*.

Such textual fidelity is laudable, of course; it's the vivid characterisations that make these performances extraordinary. In the first movement alone, for example, there's the sudden, pensive melancholy of the fugal passage at 6'10"; the whispered confessional at 10'01"; and the heart-rendingly tender coda at 11'40". Perhaps the Danel might have made more of the hairpin dynamic markings in the Scherzo, but their reading throws a spotlight on the music's pregnant silences, making them even more expressive than usual.

The Piano Quintet benefits enormously from thoughtful microphone placement. The piano is more an accomplice than an instigator here – not that this shift in any way dampens the music's dramatic impact. The threat of violence at the end of the first movement (beginning at 14'19"), for example, feels very real; the ratcheting-up of intensity at 7'12" in the *Lento* is positively harrowing; and there's an immersive, claustrophobia-inducing *cinéma noir* quality to much of the finale.

Both of these works have been admirably served on disc. I cherish the Malibran Quartet's ardent account of the String Quartet (Cypres, 5/13) and Gabriel Tacchino's incendiary version of the Quintet with the Quatuor Athenaeum-Enescu (Pierre Verany, 12/92), but this new recording by the Quatuor Danel and Paavali Jumppanen is the most gripping yet – and by a long shot. Urgently recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

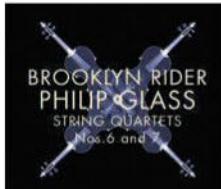
## Glass

String Quartets – No 6, No 7.

Saxophone Quartet (arr Brooklyn Rider)

**Brooklyn Rider**

Orange Mountain Music (F) OMM0121 (64' • DDD)



The New York-based string quartet Brooklyn Rider have featured Philip Glass as part of their eclectic repertoire since their formation over 10 years ago. This recording of Glass's String Quartets Nos 6 and 7 follows on from their 2011 release of the composer's String Quartets Nos 1-5 (8/11).

The disc actually starts off with the quartet's own arrangement of Glass's Saxophone Quartet (1995). Set out in alternating pairs of movements in a slow-fast-slow-fast sequence, the understated

first movement gives way to a propulsive, Bartók-like second, frequently punctuated by rhythmic unisons. A similar dancelike atmosphere is conjured up in the final movement, while the introspective third makes particularly effective use of the deeper, resonant timbre of a quartet comprising two violas rather than the usual two violins.

If the Saxophone Quartet represents easy-listening Glass, his String Quartet No 6 (2013) lies at the opposite end. Set out this time in three movements, the Sixth draws from *Spuren der Verirrten* ('The Lost'), Glass's large-scale multimedia opera for Linz Opera written around the same time. Texturally dense, full of abrupt contrasts and edgy harmonies, the first movement builds up to a series of dissonant chordal statements that carry echoes of the 'Es muss sein' moment from the finale of Beethoven's Op 135 String Quartet. These sharp juxtapositions prevent the music from ever fully settling, although the ending does offer a resolution.

The String Quartet No 7 (2014) is in many respects the most interesting work on display here. Unlike Glass's other quartets, the seventh unfolds in a single 17-minute span, wherein both simple/complex and more introverted/extrovert elements of the composer's musical character are explored. It's a work that demands further listening, which is perhaps not always the case with Glass. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Janitsch

'Rediscoveries from the Sara Levy Collection'

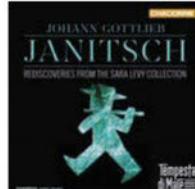
Sonatas da camera – Op 3 No 14; Op 4 No 21;

Op 6 No 35. Sonata da chiesa, Op 7 No 2.

Ouverture grosso

**Tempesta di Mare**

Chandos Chaconne (F) CHAN0820 (67' • DDD)



The Berlin composer Johann Gottlieb Janitsch (1708-c1762) occasionally catches the ear on anthologies of music from the court of Frederick the Great but only in recent years has he begun to have releases devoted entirely to him, and this is the first to have come my way. A double-bassist, he was one of the original members of the small band Prince Frederick formed in the 1730s and which also included JG Graun, Georg Benda and CPE Bach. When Frederick became king in 1740, Janitsch stayed with him until his own death.

One might expect, then, that his music would speak the refined but nervy North German expressive language we associate



Abrupt contrasts and edgy harmonies: Brooklyn Rider continue their advocacy of Philip Glass's string quartets

today with CPE Bach. So it does; but while the four sonatas recorded here – all ‘quadros’ for three instruments and continuo – may not match Bach at his most intense, they are more than just a shadow. Not only is the writing fluent and assured but it has a personal character of its own, not so much perhaps in the outbreaks of instrumental recitative in the E flat Sonata, but in the tender cradling of the chorale ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’ in the G minor (written in memory of Janitsch’s daughter) or the atmospheric opening movement of the A minor Sonata, that hint at the ineffable emotional eloquence of CPE’s great father.

Tempesta di Mare catch the mood of these moments, and their playing is stylish in polish and detailing. There is energy, too, in some of the faster fugal movements but I wish they could have summoned more in the moderate-tempo ones. Frankly there are times when things flag, and I can well imagine this music performed more compellingly. Neither is the sense of flow helped by a balance that, while clear, is somewhat close and dry (this is especially hard on the violin). Thankfully, an enlarged ensemble ramps it up at the end for a double-orchestra *Ouverture grosso* that is just what it says

it is, a joyful hotchpotch of movements and styles that could almost be a lost symphony by Boyce. **Lindsay Kemp**

### Mozart

Serenades – No 11, K375; No 12, K388.  
La clemenza di Tito – Harmoniemusik  
(Act 1, arr Triebensee)

**Oslo Chamber Academy**

LAWO (F) LWC1141 (80' • DDD)



What could be better than Mozart in entertainment mode, writing with his characteristic sensitivity for wind instruments? And what could be better than two of his finest outdoor octets from the 1780s? The Oslo Kammerakademie, founded by David Friedemann Strunck, principal oboist of the city’s Philharmonic Orchestra, use period horns with modern woodwinds, and those wonderful valveless instruments form the backbone to the sound here, chattering, clattering and chortling as well as providing gentle sustaining power.

Mozart shows both sides of his musical personality in the two serenades, with the

lyrical E flat work, K375 (in its revised version with added oboes), contrasting with the furrow-browed *Sturm und Drang* of the C minor, K388. Each member of the Academy is a crack soloist and there is never a poorly turned phrase or an ill-considered blend; ornamentation, too, while subtly employed, is suitably piquant.

It comes as a bit of a surprise after the grand C major close of K388 to drop suddenly into B flat for the *Clemenza Overture* (Mozart wrote it in trumpet-festooned C major) but it turns out that Joseph Triebensee, himself an oboist who made these arrangements of the first-act numbers from the opera, wasn’t afraid to transpose at will to fit his ensemble to perfection. Wonderful solos, too: for example the bassoon as Sesto in ‘Come ti piace imponi’ and the oboe as Vitellia in ‘Deh se piacer mi vuoi’. And the horns – the horns! – in the Marcia.

The microphones move out a touch for the *Harmoniemusik* to accommodate the addition of string bass and timpani, so the sound here is a little less rascally than in the serenades, which is perhaps fitting for Mozart’s valedictory *opera seria*. Wonderful music, wonderfully played. **David Threasher**

# elina vähälä & niek de groot

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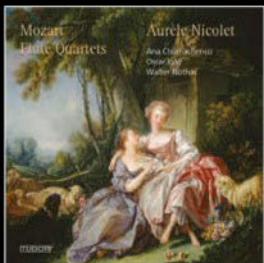
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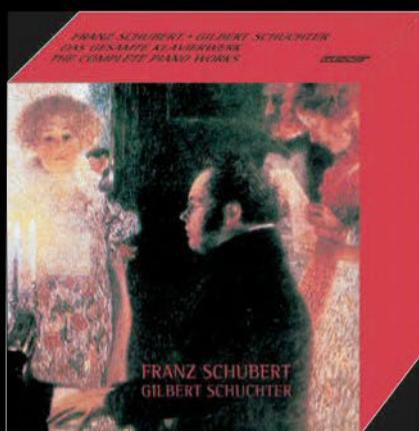
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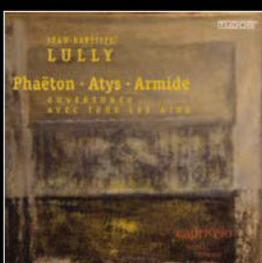


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## M Parsons

'Patterns of Connection - Instrumental Music 1962-2017'  
**Philip Thomas** pf Apartment House  
 Huddersfield Contemporary Recordings  
 M ② HCR15CD (147' • DDD)



In 1969 Michael Parsons founded the Scratch Orchestra alongside Cornelius Cardew and Howard Skempton. Parsons's music before then tended to post-Weberian atonality; after, he pursued a formalistic, systems-based vein, eventually readmitting indeterminate elements. Apartment House's association with his music is longstanding (Parsons has composed two *Apartment House Suites*) and here the ensemble present the first substantial survey of his work. Covering six decades, it's a rich collection that helps fill in our picture of British music since the 1960s.

The music is presented in a non-chronological order. Most works are relatively brief, many insistently repeating a given pattern – rhythmic, melodic, contrapuntal – until reaching exhaustion. *12 Part Canon* (1997) for solo piano is a case in point, a babbling sheet of colour punched out from minimal means (Philip Thomas plays as if at a musical typewriter). *Talea 3* (1999) for solo cello extracts unusual contours from quasi-tonal material. *Kettle's Yard Canon* (1996) for clarinet and flute is reminiscent of Castiglione's unreeling repetitions. At times it almost sounds like non-Western music, as in *Percussion & Glissandi* (1999), where dappled woodblock falls across sustained string and wind surfaces.

The systems-based nature of much of Parsons's music sees unfamiliar sounds emerge from familiar material. Even when tonal elements are present, the process-based nature of the music conjures something much more meditative. In *Independent Pulses* (1998) colours gently flicker around the ensemble in brief notes recurring out of phase. The semi-delirious repetition of short figures in *Second Bagatelle* (1990) for solo piano shows from where Laurence Crane takes his cue. It's not always successful, though: *Fourths and Fifths* (1990, one of three works here with that title) for solo flute is banal in material and robotic in phrasing.

The helpings here are generous – perhaps even too generous. Accordingly it's a release to listen to not in one go but over time in morsels. **Liam Cagney**

## Reger

String Trios – No 1, Op 77b; No 2, Op 141b.  
 Piano Quartet No 2, Op 133<sup>a</sup>  
**Trio Lirico** with <sup>a</sup>Detlev Eisinger pf  
 Audite ② AUDITE97 714 (84' • DDD)



Once read, it's hard to forget, but best to lay aside Reger's claim for his Op 77b String Trio as satisfying the demands of his age for a new Mozart. 'Even more beautiful' it may be than the Flute Serenade with which it shares an opus number, but the trio's least far-fetched claim to cast some flickering shadow of Mozartian lightness of spirit lies in a divertimento-like character most pleasingly heard in a *Larghetto* which shares the formal, spacious layout and grave beauties of the gardens in Potsdam and the Nymphenburg. The rough, stamping humour of the subsequent Scherzo rather coarsely banishes any lingering illusion of imperial (or Classical) finesse, though the finale makes partial amends with a Haydn-esque turn of dialogue and brevity.

If the steam of dumplings still rises from Reger's better-known chamber and orchestral music for some listeners – I'm rather partial to a dish of Griessklösschen myself – then they should find the calorie count more to their taste in the attenuated textures of the string trio, even in the more densely woven lines of Op 141b. The German Trio Lirico do a fine job of sounding more like a sextet, not without some effort caught by the microphones. Rival ensembles on Naxos and Gramola are also audibly taxed – somehow huffing and sighing are grist to the mill of the Regerian aesthetic – but I prefer the ebb and flow of the new recording, the opportunities for contrast and genial dialogue taken wherever they arise, such as in the serenade-like lilt of the first movement's second theme.

The Second Piano Quartet is one of those several works composed after Reger had had a close encounter with a Brahmsian archetype (in this case the C minor Quartet, Op 60), and there is even a furtive tip of the hat to his exemplar at the start of the development section. Here again a sympathetic recording balance is key to the success of the performance, placing Detlev Eisinger's contribution at a discreet distance while making clear that this is a partnership of musical equals.

**Peter Quantrill**

String Trios – selected comparisons:  
*Aperto Pf Qt* (NAXO) 8 570785/6 (oas)  
*Vogl Stg Trio* (GRAM) 98943

## C Schumann • R Schumann

'Romances'  
**C Schumann** Drei Romanzen, Op 22  
**R Schumann** Kinderszenen, Op 15 (arr Lund) – No 7, Träumerei; No 8, Am Kamin. Meine Rose, Op 90 No 2. Mein schöner Stern!, Op 101 No 2. Drei Romanzen, Op 94. Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102 – No 2, Langsam; No 3, Nicht schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen; No 4, Nicht zu rasch. Six Studies in Canonic Form, Op 56<sup>a</sup>  
**Céline Moinet** ob <sup>a</sup>**Norbert Anger** vc  
**Florian Uhlig** pf

Berlin Classics ② 0300991BC (59' • DDD)



Céline Moinet and Florian Uhlig's Schumann album places the Op 94 Romances for oboe and piano alongside a sequence of arrangements and transcriptions for the same pairing, many uncredited in the accompanying booklet notes, though some are identified as dating from the 19th century: the *Kinderszenen* extracts are the work of the oboist and composer Emilius Lund, who famously promoted Op 94 in his concert repertory in the 1860s; 'Abendlied' derives from an anonymous arrangement published in 1870. Schumann, however, sanctioned a version of Op 94 for violin, a process that Moinet and Uhlig effectively reverse for both Clara's Op 22 Romances, written for Joseph Joachim, and the central movements of Robert's *Fünf Stücke im Volkston*, where Moinet plays an arrangement of the violin alternative that Schumann provided for the original cello part. The Pedal Piano Studies, meanwhile, come in Theodor Kirchner's 1888 piano trio version, in which Moinet again takes over the violin line. As with clarinettist Patrick Messina's comparably programmed Schumann disc (*Aparté*, 8/17), you can't quite escape a sense of appropriation in places, though you may find that the quality of the performances outweighs any qualms.

This is an appealing partnership, with Uhlig's lucidity and refinement both supporting and offsetting Moinet's ravishing tone and expressive sensitivity throughout. There's wit as well as elegance in the *Stücke im Volkston*, while an undertow of passion lurks beneath Clara's Op 22, where the long-breathed oboe lines unfold with almost operatic eloquence, and Uhlig really comes into his own in the surging figurations in the last movement. Cellist Norbert Anger joins them for the Pedal Piano Studies, where the counterpoint is admirably clear and there's a real sense of give and take

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## VIOLIN MUSES

**Richard Whitehouse** find much to enjoy in a varied selection of recent discs for violin and piano



Violinist Mari Poll is joined by her brother Mihkel in works by Enescu, Poulenc, Schoenberg and Tüür

For all that it is considered hazardous in terms of balance and integration, the duo of violin and piano has built up a varied repertoire over the past two centuries. This selection provides a viable overview from the 20th and 21st centuries of that medium 'where opposites meet'.

Few British violinists have been as active in recent years as Madeleine Mitchell in promoting and the commissioning of new music, as can be heard on **Violin Muse**. The largest work here is a violin concerto – Guto Pryderi Puw's *Soft Stillness*, taking its cue from *The Merchant of Venice* over two movements, restless then soulful, evoking much of its nocturnal expectancy. There is also *Atlantic Drift*, a piquant set of folk-inspired pieces for two violinists by Judith Weir in which Mitchell is partnered by Cerys Jones. Otherwise, she and pianist Nigel Clayton tackle the teasing understatement of Geoffrey Poole's

*Rhapsody*, amalgam of intermezzo and waltz in David Matthews's *Romanza*, plainsong-informed meditation that is Sadie Harrison's *Aurea luce* and wistful melancholy of Michael Berkeley's *Veilleuse*. *Taking it as Read*, two hymn-like miniatures by Michael Nyman, round off a diverse and finely realised programme.

One composer not featured is **David Collins** (b1953), whose music for violin and piano has been recorded by Duo Ardorè. The First Sonata is a sizeable piece, its rather unwieldy opening movement balanced by telescoping the slow movement and finale into a gripping continuity, while its two-movement successor is as formally subtle as it is expressively immediate. The plaintive yet quirky Oboe Sonata sounds idiomatic in transcription, while the *Sette Invenzioni* makes for a diverting sequence of test-pieces. Pursuing an eventful and capricious interplay of Far Eastern

styles, *Oriental Fantasy* brings to its close a disc whose appeal is enhanced by the playing of Rebecca Raimondi and Alessandro Viale, who both audibly relish this music.

Two releases by the enterprising Dux label focus on younger Polish violinists in music mainly of the earlier 20th century. **Karolina Piątkowska-Nowicka** and **Piotr Nowicki** are a well-matched duo technically and temperamentally, witness their acute response to the speculative changes of mood in Debussy's Violin Sonata that amounts to an effortlessly cohesive whole. Prokofiev's First Violin Sonata finds this composer at his most sombre and unyielding, its outer movements anticipating Shostakovich's late chamber music, but these players bring a rhythmic trenchancy to its Scherzo then rapt inwardness to its *Andante* which open out the expressive profile accordingly. Lutosławski's Partita is typical of his mature music, its three tensile movements separated by improvisatory interludes, and this account pulls no punches.

From a husband-and-wife to a sister-and-brother team – **Mari Poll** and **Mihkel Poll** offer a comparably varied recital which commences with Enescu's masterly Third Violin Sonata. If the opening *Moderato* is a shade under-characterised, the suffused eloquence of its central *Andante* and vehemence of its final *Allegro* are both powerfully conveyed. Poulenc's Violin Sonata makes for an effective foil, leaving formal cohesion to fend for itself as it traverses a gamut of emotion, veering between hectic jollity and that acute melancholy barely below the surface. Schoenberg's *Fantasy* could not be further removed in its gaunt and often glowering rhetoric, but these players have its measure; as they do of two pieces by Erkki-Sven Tüür, the ingenuity of *Conversio* and nonchalance of *Walk on the Rope*, that end this persuasive recital.

Claire Howick already has exemplary discs of Cyril Scott and female composers to her credit, and her programme of **British Music for Violin and Piano** is no less fine. Commencing with an account of Elgar's Violin Sonata whose formal tautness and expressive impetus banish any thought of passive fatalism, this otherwise consists of short pieces by that composer's relative contemporaries. Notable are four pieces by Bridge previously unrecorded –

a blithe *Country Dance*, fleeting *Con moto*, surging *Une lamentation d'amour* and eloquent *Meditation* – that together serve as reminder of his early music's accessibility and finesse. Also here are two evocative sonnets by Scott; winsome miniatures by Delius and Ireland; and, to finish, Elgar's robust Mazurka. The fastidious pianism of John Paul Ekins is a model of lucid and astute accompaniment.

Finally to a disc of **Finnish Violin Music**, though here again violin and piano are only a part of the story. As ensemble leader, Annemarie Åström is a formidable advocate of the Piano Trio by Helvi Leiviskä, its two movements forming a powerful unity which galvanises an outwardly late-Romantic idiom. Best known for his frequently discursive orchestral works, Erkki Melartin wrote little chamber music, yet his String Trio exudes an astringency and tensile economy to make one wish otherwise. In partnership with Tilna Karakorpi, Åström turns finally to Väinö Raitio – a harbinger of musical modernism in Finland such as is only intermittently evident in the four pieces published as his Op 18, with their Impressionist harmonies and fervent emotional import. The later *Blue Hepatica* is more restrained yet also more personal – violin and piano brought into a diaphanous accord that, whatever its stylistic limitations, forms an understated paradigm for just how these instruments can be combined. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**'Violin Muse'**  
Mitchell; BBC NOW / Outwater  
Divine Art DDA25160



**Collins** Works for Violin & Piano  
Duo Ardore  
Sheva Contemporary SH175



**Debussy, Lutosławski, Poulenc**  
Piątkowska-Nowicka, Nowicki  
Dux DUX1358



**Enescu, Poulenc, Schoenberg, Tüür**  
M & M Poll  
Dux DUX1383



**'British Music for Violin and Piano'**  
Howick, Ekins  
Naxos 8 573790



**'Finnish Violin Music'**  
Kaaås Trio et al  
Alba ABCD410

between the three players. Lund's *Kinderszenen* extracts add nothing to the original, though Moinet's dreamy lyricism in 'Traumerei' is, in itself, persuasive. The disc's *raison d'être*, however, remains the Op 94 Romances – an exquisite performance, understated, subtle and quite wonderfully refined. Some may prefer the greater intensity and deeper introversion of Heinz Holliger and Alfred Brendel here (Decca Eloquence, 3/81) but this is a most beautiful interpretation nevertheless.

**Tim Ashley**

## Shostakovich

Violin Sonata, Op 134.  
Piano Trios<sup>a</sup> – No 1, Op 8; No 2, Op 67  
**Ilya Gringolts vn** <sup>a</sup>**Daniel Haefliger vc**  
**Gilles Vonsattel pf**  
Claves 50-1817 (68' • DDD)

## Shostakovich

Violin Sonata, Op 134.  
Preludes, Op 34 (arr Tsyanov/Auerbach)  
**Sergei Dogadin vn** **Nikolai Tokarev pf**  
Naxos 8 573753 (75' • DDD)



It makes sense to couple the two Shostakovich piano trios, even if his first work in the form is a not-quite-complete student exercise and his wartime masterpiece can prove difficult to bring off. Ilya Gringolts, raised in what was then Leningrad and nowadays Swiss-based, joins Swiss-born colleagues in capable readings unlikely to make great waves. With their American-domiciled pianist opting for cultivated discretion, the string players sometimes fail to find the bleak heart of the Second Trio despite exploring variations of timbre from vibrato-less pallor to insistent raspiness. The opening paragraph is kept deliberately bald, the recording tangibly present.

Many contemporary groups seem to bypass the *con sordino* markings at the cyclic return of first-movement material in the finale. Not so here, yet the likes of Gidon Kremer better convey the sense of strain produced by playing as loudly as possible on the muted instrument. Then again, the latter's high-octane 1998 collaboration with Mischa Maisky and Martha Argerich was condemned as twitchy and over the top by *Gramophone*'s reviewer. The 'authenticity' of the émigré Borodin Trio, working a decade earlier when the Soviet Union was still very

much intact, is exemplified by statelier manners and an unhurried Scherzo. Somehow both these vintage renditions feel more involved than the modern team.

There's more Russian dirt under the fingernails in the Violin Sonata, the substantial makeweight. You might miss the heavier style, 'pulsing' vibrato and closer miking of Oleg Kagan with Sviatoslav Richter but the brooding restraint of Gringolts and Gilles Vonsattel in the sober opening movement is complemented by an aptly stomping Scherzo. For fans of physical format it may all come down to couplings. Vladimir Ashkenazy and friends round out their recent piano trio pairing with the Viola Sonata instead. Isabelle Faust is the violinist on an overlapping issue of the Violin Sonata whose prime selling point is Alexander Melnikov's exceptional advocacy of the two piano concertos.

At medium price, Sergei Dogadin and Nikolai Tokarev offer a different take on the Violin Sonata, broader than usual in the later movements. We can't be sure Shostakovich would have approved – he raced through his own oeuvre nervily and at speed – but their music-making is carefully considered rather than maximally intense. The cheerier Preludes are given in Dmitry Tsyanov's arrangements plus five realised more recently by the Russian-American polymath Lera Auerbach. Where older recordings tended to present Tsyanov's 19 transcriptions in his own sequence, this one restores the original order of Shostakovich's Op 34 set.

Final-round performances of the composer's First Violin Concerto helped Dogadin to victory in 2015's Hanover-based Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition and second place in 2016's Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition. Not the first Russian pianist to share a name with a prominent oligarch but possibly the first to tour in black leather trousers, Tokarev has been more ubiquitous on disc. Naxos provides decent notes, less in the way of glamour.

**David Gutman**

*Piano Trio No 2 – selected comparisons:*  
**Borodin Trio** (4/85) (CHAN) CHAN8342  
**Kremer, Maisky, Argerich** (10/99<sup>b</sup>) (DG) 477 8847GB8  
**Ashkenazy, Visontay, Lidström**  
(9/16) (DECC) 478 9382DH  
*Violin Sonata – selected comparisons:*  
**Kagan, Richter** (5/96<sup>b</sup>) (ALTO) ALC1328  
**Faust, Melnikov** (5/12) (HARM) HMC90 2104

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# Cathy Berberian

As far as is possible within the confines of these pages, Edward Breen explores the vocalist's fascinating career – defined by eclecticism, experimentation, unorthodoxy and sheer chutzpah

To explore the work of Cathy Berberian (1925–83) is to gaze in wonderment at the versatility and creativity of the human voice. In the 1950s and '60s she was in the thick of the musical avant-garde, fusing gestural utterances with traditional modes of singing to widen the aesthetic parameters of composition for solo voice. Her dazzling performances (which became known as New Vocality) inspired many composers, but she didn't limit herself to Darmstadt circles; as Philip Clark wrote in this very magazine more than a decade ago, her career 'relentlessly posed the question, "which avant-garde?"' (3/06).

Berberian was born into an American-Armenian family and inspired by recordings of the great Italian tenor Tito Schipa. She studied dance and music at Columbia and New York universities before

travelling to Milan in 1950 to study singing with Giorgina del Vigo. It was in searching for a pianist to accompany her Fulbright Scholarship application that she met the young composer Berio, and they married a few months later. During the following years the couple had a daughter and settled in Milan. Berio was part of the developing Studio di Fonologia at Italian broadcaster RAI's Milan studios. In 1957 he collaborated with Umberto Eco, who was studying James Joyce, to make a radio programme about onomatopoeia. This gave birth to Berio's *Thema – Omaggio a Joyce* (BV Haast Records CD9109), worked from Berberian's reading from Joyce's *Ulysses*. It is difficult today to grasp how intoxicatingly new this was at the time, but in Berberian, Berio had met not only an extraordinarily intelligent vocalist but also a mezzo-soprano willing to step outside the traditional Western classical music mould – a rare and valuable combination.

*Thema*, however, was not to be Berberian's big break. That came the following year when Cage visited the Studio di Fonologia and heard her live vocal imitation of tape montages (a long-running domestic joke in the Berio household). So struck was Cage with her ability to switch instantaneously between vocal modes that he was inspired to write *Aria with Fontana Mix* (Time Records TLP LP 58003, 1961; re-released on CD in 2010 – Wergo

*She was an extraordinarily intelligent vocalist and a mezzo-soprano willing to step outside the traditional mould – a rare and valuable combination*

WER69342). In *Aria*, Berberian performs texts in five different languages and ten different singing styles, all interspersed with a plethora of 'noises'. Again, the newness is neatly encapsulated in a story that Berberian often told. After the first performance in Rome in 1959, she translated for a question-and-answer session at which an audience member asked: 'Mr Cage, how could you let that lady do such obscene things?'

Berio's *Circles* (1960) – for which she had helped to choose the EE Cummings poems – offered Berberian her American debut. The long arc of Berio's vocal line showcased her

great flexibility and won her understandable recognition; however, the truly astonishing Berberian-Berio collaboration that remains shockingly fresh is not this feted American debut, nor the justifiably popular

*Folk Songs* (1964), nor the famous and fascinating *Sequenza III* (1965), but the intimate and claustrophobic *Visage* (1961) for magnetic tape (BV Haast Records CD9109, 2/67<sup>R</sup>). Here, Berberian improvised a pseudo-language based on phonetics from English, Hebrew and Neapolitan dialect and used it to convey emotions as prompted by the composer. The result, originally intended for radio, was never broadcast and it's not hard to fathom why. Consider the barrage of electronic taunts around 3'04", after which Berberian's laughter invokes a fine line between pleasure and pain. The sexual overtones are palpable and the voyeuristic intimations almost overwhelming. It's an incredibly powerful and personal piece of work from both artists.

Berberian's own composition *StripSody* (1966) is best heard in a live concert performance on MagnifiCathy (Wergo WER60054, 7/89) replete with giggles and gasps from the

audience. If you don't already know this piece, it's a delight and the score is as visually fascinating as the artistry is stunning. Drawing on comic strips and monody, Berberian performs the onomatopoeic interjections that so characterise the comic-strip genre. There's a particularly meta-Berberian sequence at about 1'50" where the vocalist cruises the radio dial beginning with a fragment of 'Sempre libera' from *La traviata*, switching to the

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### • 1950 – Marries Luciano Berio

She and the Italian composer separate in 1964

### • 1957 – Official debut

Debut in Naples at an Incontri Musicali concert

### • 1959 – A John Cage premiere

January 5: sings *Aria with Fontana Mix* at a concert sponsored by the Accademia Filarmonica in Rome

### • 1960 – American debut

Returns to her native state to perform the premiere of Berio's *Circles* at Tanglewood

### • 1966 – Creates her first own composition

Composes *StripSody* for solo voice, the first of two original pieces



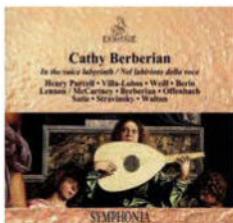
Beatles and then a weather forecast, all knowingly framed by a sigh and a sob. It's a homage to Cage, a commentary on her other recitals and a characteristic mix of pop and high culture all encapsulated beautifully by a headline in the *New York Times* (May 5, 1968): 'It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Berberian'.

Berberian's career is too vast and too clever by half to capture in one short article, but I think the scope of her cultural appetite and artistic versatility can be detected on the album 'In the Voice Labyrinth / Nel labirinto della voce', which includes my personal favourite: Beatles songs arranged by Louis

Andriessen. In 'Michelle', Ravel's Sonatine wafts past Berberian who, in full-on French chanson mode, teeters deliciously towards cabaret. She once described contemporary music as simply 'what's happening today' and insisted that the

Beatles were important because they reflected the youth of the era. In her performance of 'Ticket to Ride' 'as it might be sung by a Handel oratorio singer in the provinces', her observation is as sharp as her execution. For those of us who spent early careers singing oratorio in the provinces, it's an uncomfortable ride. 'Which avant-garde' indeed. **G**

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



**'In the Voice Labyrinth' - incl works by Berberian, Berio, Satie, Stravinsky, Villa-Lobos, Walton, Weill, Lennon/McCartney, Armenian songs**  
Cathy Berberian *mez et al*  
Symphonia Ermitage

# Instrumental



Patrick Rucker enjoys Edoardo Torbianelli's period-piano Chopin:

*'A fortissimo of the magnitude we've become accustomed to would simply render this piano mute'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



Jeremy Nicholas listens to Rachmaninov on two pianos:

*'Owen and Apekisheva have been playing together for years, and bring subtle give-and-take and wonderfully precise ensemble'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

## JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Ning Feng *vn*

Channel Classics ® ② CCS39018 (147' • DDD)



Ning Feng's solo Bach is quite unlike anyone else's, pure filigree in certain of

the faster movements (the *presto* Double from the First Partita or the Prelude to the Third), loose-limbed and long-breathed in the Adagios, the G minor Sonata's opening movement remarkable for its elasticity and subtle dynamic shifts. Then there are the Fugues, again forever altering in volume or emphases, the way the A minor Fugue twists and turns, its double-stops positively kaleidoscopic. But it's the illusion of a freewheeling conversation projected from within that held me captive, a sense of constant musing, the range of voices, tonally speaking, and Feng's flat refusal to stick to a metronomic pulse – that, and the expressive scope of his playing, emotionally potent yet with the most discreet use of vibrato. People often tell me that vibrato isn't necessary for underlining the expressive properties of a piece. I take that claim on board intellectually but Feng is one of the few violinists who have for me demonstrated the theory's rightness simply by the way he plays. Also the way he inserts tiny pauses between phrases, like minute intakes of breath, suggests parallels with the singing voice.

The D minor Chaconne is a case in point, a performance that honours the dancing origins of the piece (or should I say of 'the form'), much enhanced by Feng's ethereally detached phrasing in the instrument's higher reaches. Alina Ibragimova is also marvellous in this respect but Feng's extended repertoire of expressive gestures somehow draws me further into the workings of the piece. Arpeggiated passages are invariably

either wistful or exciting and while colour-coding is a prominent virtue – with the Chaconne in particular – musical structure is never downplayed.

Aside from Ibragimova and of course the feted 'historicals' (too many of those to detail in this context), there are other players on the current circuit whose Bach-playing on disc I greatly admire, violinists such as the sweet-toned Hilary Hahn (the Third Sonata and Partitas Nos 2 & 3 – Sony, 2/98) and playful Ilya Gringolts (Second Sonata and Partitas Nos 1 & 3 – DG, 11/03), both of them highly individual interpreters of this timeless music; but Feng's manner catches my breath in the way theirs doesn't, quite. Asked to quote just one movement as a demonstration track it would have to be the Largo from the Third (C major) Sonata, just over three minutes' worth but a perfect sampling of Feng's sublimely perceptive approach. Yes, there are other ways to play this music – more extrovert, or austere, or heated, or overtly virtuosic – but if you want to take Bach's solo violin music to your heart, intimately and as food for musical thought, then Feng's recordings strike me as well-nigh ideal.

Rob Cowan

*Sonatas & Partitas – selected comparison:  
Ibragimova (11/09) (HYPE) CDA67691/2*

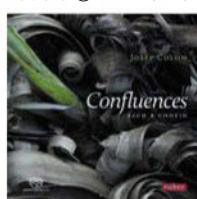
## JS Bach · Chopin

'Confluences'

**JS Bach Preludes from Das wohltemperirte Clavier, BWV846-893 (selection)** **Chopin Etudes: Op 10 – No 1; No 2; No 4; No 5; No 6; No 8; No 9; No 11; Op 25 – No 2; No 12. Nocturnes – No 3, Op 9 No 3; No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 14, Op 48 No 2**

**Josep Colom** *pf*

Eudora ® EUD-SACD1703 (78' • DDD/DSD)



Josep Colom does more than merely intersperse Bach Preludes from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and various Nocturnes and Études by Chopin. He

juxtaposes most of them with careful consideration vis-à-vis key relationships and textural commonalities, and improvises (at least I think he improvises) seamless transitions that connect the pieces, assiduously interweaving all of the music into a continuous, mosaic-like fabric.

For example, after the Chopin 'Black Key' Étude's climactic cascading octaves and concluding chord, Colom cuts off that chord except for a lone, sustained G flat. This note dovetails into a lyrical single melody line that first explores a G flat pentatonic scale but soon modulates and ambles its way into the vicinity of the Bach E minor Prelude's basic rhythm. The Bach Prelude starts before you know it. At the Prelude's end, Colom effects a shorter linear bridge that quickly yet comfortably eases into Chopin's E flat minor Étude. By contrast, a longer, cadenza-like passage provides a convincingly Chopinesque passageway from the latter's B major Nocturne, Op 9 No 3, to Bach's F sharp minor Prelude. As the programme approaches its final stages, Colom dispenses with interludes, save for just a handful of notes to provide a little wiggle-room between the Bach C minor Prelude's rhapsodic ending and the arpeggio floodgate of Chopin's C minor Étude, Op 25 No 12.

Sometimes Colom's performances downplay stylistic differences to the point of homogeneity. Notice, for instance, the almost romanticised dynamic contrasts of the Bach C major Prelude leading into more intimately sculpted, less glittery extended figurations than usual in the Chopin Étude in the same key, Op 10 No 1. The diptych of Bach's D major Prelude/Chopin's F major Étude, Op 10 No 8, share similar holds, hesitations and taperings one otherwise might question in stand-alone readings. In other words, more incisive and diversely characterised interpretation would not only strengthen the case for Colom's provocative programme-building but also help sustain interest over repeated hearings. **Jed Distler**



Josep Colom interweaves Bach and Chopin into a continuous, mosaic-like fabric

## Bersa

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 1'

Piano Sonata No 2, Op 20. At the Strand (Na žalu). Notturno, Op 38. Ora triste, Op 37. Fantaisie-imromptu, Op 27. Ballabile. Bagatella, Op 16. In the Old Way (Po načinu starih). Marcia trionfale, Op 24

Goran Filipec *pf*

Grand Piano *GP* GP767 (56' • DDD)



Until this disc arrived for review, my only exposure to the Croatian composer Blagoje Bersa (1873–1934) was through his exuberant, breathtakingly orchestrated tone poem *Suncana polja* ('Sunny Fields'). So where has his amazing piano music been hiding all these years? It's colourful, unabashedly virtuoso and quite substantial.

The 1897 Second Sonata in one continuous movement might be described as Strauss's confidently soaring melodies and Rimsky-Korsakov's exoticism served up by Rachmaninov, Busoni and Medtner jostling for room on the piano bench. Much of *Na žalu* ('At the Strand') consists of ravishing and slithering chords anchored

by a D flat pedal point, while the lyrically oriented *Notturno* and *Ora triste* sometimes hint at Spanish Impressionism, especially in the climactic outbursts. As the booklet note suggests, the *Fantaisie-Imromptu* is clearly inspired by Liszt, although I'd call it Liszt on steroids, just as the *Bagatella*, Op 16, belies its title in regard to its seven-minute length and meaty piano-writing.

While the triptych *Po načinu starih* ('In the Old Way') refers to older, less harmonically involved styles, Bersa's tangy melodic twists and turns are like pinches of mint in a vanilla pudding. The concluding work, a nine minute *Marcia trionfale*, is deceptively titled. It's not a march but a relentless invasion of octaves in all directions, save for a few windows of respite that allow the pianist to gather up strength and reload the ammunition.

If I haven't yet mentioned Goran Filipec's performances it's because he basically left me stunned and speechless from the first notes, and I'm still recovering! This pianist commands a transcendental technique and possesses an unflappable sonority that refuses to splinter, notwithstanding Bersa's thickest onslaughts. He unleashes shattering *fortissimos* that never lapse into banging

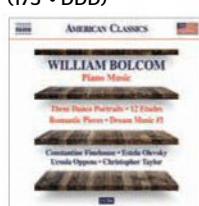
and conveys the kind of textural diversity needed to bring this composer's demanding keyboard idiom to life. Grand Piano's vibrant sound does both pianist and composer ample justice. I cannot recommend this release highly enough and, needless to say, I look forward to Vol 2. **Jed Distler**

## Bolcom

Ballade<sup>a</sup>. The Brooklyn Dodge<sup>b</sup>. Conversations with Andre<sup>c</sup>. Dream Music #1<sup>b</sup>. Estela: Rag Latino<sup>d</sup>. Fantasy-Sonata<sup>b</sup>. New York Lights: Concert Paraphrase<sup>a</sup>. Night Meditations<sup>c</sup>. Night Pieces<sup>a</sup>. Romantic Pieces<sup>c</sup>. Spring Dances<sup>c</sup>. Three Dance Portraits<sup>a</sup>. Twelve Études<sup>b</sup>. Variations on a Theme by George Rochberg<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Constantine Finehouse, <sup>b</sup>Estela Oleksy, <sup>c</sup>Ursula Oppens, <sup>d</sup>Christopher Taylor *pf*

Naxos American Classics *GP* ③ 8 559832/4 (173' • DDD)



Prolific across almost all genres, William Bolcom (80 this May) is also a formidable pianist at both concert and cabaret level – evidence of which is apparent throughout

# GRAMOPHONE Focus

## HOMMAGE À DEBUSSY

**Jed Distler** listens to complementary discs of Debussy's Préludes from DG's venerable pianists Daniel Barenboim and Maurizio Pollini

### Debussy

Préludes, Book 1. Élegie. Estampes. La plus que lente. Suite bergamasque - Clair de lune  
**Daniel Barenboim** *pfs*  
 DG ④ 479 8741GH (70' • DDD)

### Debussy

Préludes, Book 2. En blanc et noir<sup>a</sup>  
**Maurizio Pollini, <sup>a</sup>Daniele Pollini** *pfs*  
 DG ④ 479 8490 (49' • DDD)



Daniel Barenboim's first solo Debussy CD is not as new as it appears. The *Préludes* Book 1 comprise the

soundtrack for a 1998 video (EuroArts, 11/02), while the remaining selections stem from October 2017 studio sessions. Barenboim's Debussy pianism is uneven. He elicits warm sonorities and palpable registral differentiation in *Estampes*' opening movement, 'Pagodes', yet his frequent ritards soften the score's gamelan-like polyrhythmic edges. Rhythmic liberties also bend 'Soirée dans Grenade' out of shape. The basic habanera pulse barely registers as a point of reference, while the *tempo giusto* chords are limp rather than sharply detached. Only the soft and brief *léger et lointain* outbursts towards the end bristle with life. Barenboim's arpeggios in 'Jardins sous la pluie' evoke thunder-showers rather than

the gentle rain in Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's suppler, better-controlled traversal (Chandos, 1/08). Neither 'Clair de lune' nor *La plus que lente* convey the music's requisite simplicity and grace.

The *Préludes* begin with a broad yet occasionally sagging 'Danseuses de Delphes'. Barenboim imbues the static whole-tone harmony of 'Voiles' with alluring half-tints, even though he prefers his own tempo shadings to Debussy's more effective markings (the transitional *cédez* directives, for example). His chunky fingerwork renders 'Le vent dans la plaine' dead on arrival, but No 4 oozes nuance and sensuality. In No 5 Barenboim emphasises the build between bars 6 and 9 with minimum pedal and maximum foot stomping, while uncovering rarely heard lower-register inner voices in the central section.

If Barenboim doesn't match Steven Osborne's pinpoint control and scaling of dynamics in No 7 (Hyperion, 10/06), he unquestionably taps into the music's tumultuous character. No 8's flaxen-haired girl emerges with a kind of elusive charm via Barenboim's subtle and effective pedal blurrings. No 9's interrupted serenade moves more deliberately than usual, yet Barenboim's crisply articulated repeated notes and sense of lilt are right on the money, as are No 11's upwards scales and No 12's gawky cakewalking gruppetti. Even the unorthodoxly slow and muted *quasi tambour* passage at the end works. Barenboim's concentration and sustaining capabilities are best revealed throughout 'Des pas sur la neige' and 'La cathédrale engloutie'. In the latter, incidentally, Barenboim follows the unmarked yet implied tempo changes Debussy made in his 1913 Welte-Mignon piano roll recording.

The ample ambience and close perspective enveloping Barenboim's piano in Book 1 contrasts with the comparably focused yet relatively distant patina characterising Pollini's *Préludes* Book 2, his first Debussy outing since 1999's Book 1 (1/00). The close-lying alternating chords and scales of 'Brouillards' have a clarity and forward impetus similar to Michelangeli's DG recording, not to mention the rippling sheen of the runs from bar 29 onwards (1'17").



Daniel Barenboim brings simplicity, grace and warmth to Debussy

My only quibble concerns Pollini's insufficiently soft *pianissimos*. While he doesn't really evoke Debussy's *Lent et mélancolique* indication in 'Feuilles mortes', his gorgeous pedalwork and sexy chord-playing enliven a prelude that usually suffers from perfunctory performances. At first, 'La puerta del vino' may strike you as overly fast and driven. Listen with score in hand, however, and you'll notice how Pollini's careful and inherently musical adherence to Debussy's markings intensely underscore the composer's intention to walk that thin line between passion and violence. The left hand's steady habanera rhythm provides an insistent yet never rigid anchor for the expressive economy of Pollini's right hand.

However, in 'Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses', Pollini falls below form; the *leggierissimo* passages lack suppleness and the long *pianissimo* trills are never quiet enough. The calm and lyrical elegance one expects from 'Bruyères' is missing from Pollini's stern, unyielding rendition. But in No 6 the pianist captures General Lavine's teetering stride to perfection, even pushing ahead in hot anticipation of the sudden *fortes*. While Pollini makes each of the tempo adjustments audible in Nos 7 and 8, his literalism allows for little breathing-room and fanciful subtext. This approach works better for No 9's grave 'God Save the Queen' opening and the pianist's staggering controlled dotted double notes. The 'sad calm' implicit in the processional chords of 'Canope' seems at odds with Pollini's matter-of-fact phrasing, although there's always an appreciably dissonant edge to the recurring phrases with repeated C sharps. Pollini's alternating thirds in No 11 yield to Zimerman, Aimard and Ciani (among his DG label-mates) for control and evenness, although he must have imbibed at the fountain of youth before diving into 'Feux d'artifice'!

Pollini's son Daniele joins his father on first piano for *En blanc et noir*, where the music's acerbic wit, hair-trigger dynamic contrasts, allusive gestures, fleeting rays of warmth and myriad ensemble traps pose no problems whatsoever. Such flexible, transparent and stylish two-piano-playing augurs well for future father-and-son collaborations. **6**

this survey of those piano works which (at the composer's suggestion) are not easily available elsewhere.

Among his American contemporaries, Bolcom was early notable for an arm's-length embrace of the European avant-garde so that his earlier music is at once an interaction with yet also a critique of it. Thus the knowing expressiveness of the seven *Romantic Pieces* (1959); the tensile and not a little sardonic discourse of *Fantasy-Sonata* (1961), written in what might be called a serialised G major; and, above all, the fluid and never predictable interplay between formal and expressive gestures in the *Twelve Études* (1966) that culminates in the searching Bartók homage of 'Apotheosis', which is by some distance the most involving music to be heard on this set.

There, perhaps, lies the rub. Taking a likely cue from Luciano Berio (and with maybe even a nod to near-contemporary Richard Rodney Bennett), Bolcom is a stylistic chameleon whose own voice is not so much absent as (purposely?) underplayed. A musical chess player who knows every move in the book, he duly takes the pizazz of *The Brooklyn Dodge* (1972), the post-Romantic rhetoric of *Ballade* (2006) and sombre introspection of *Night Meditations* (2012) effortlessly in his stride, while rarely, if at all, revealing his own hand. When he does, as in the eloquent poise of the *Rochberg Variations* (1987), just where the presence of the older composer ceases and that of Bolcom starts is rendered intriguingly yet pointedly unspecific.

Maybe this hardly matters given the sheer finesse of his writing, not least as rendered by four leading American pianists. Anyone suitably provoked should accordingly investigate this set, each of whose discs is well planned as a stand-alone sequence. Piano tone is clear but never clinical and Bolcom's own notes, informative and laconic, complement his music unerringly. **Richard Whitehouse**

## Chopin

'Late Piano Works'

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58. Barcarolle, Op 60. Mazurkas: Op 50 - No 2; No 3; Op 59 No 1; Op 67 No 1. Two Nocturnes, Op 62. Polonaise-fantaisie, Op 61. Prelude, Op 45

**Edoardo Torbianelli** pf

Glossa © GCD922517 (75' • DDD)



Today the musical vistas in Haydn, Clementi and Mozart enabled

by using Walter, Stein and Broadwood pianos seem almost a given. Similar windows opened on to the sound worlds of Beethoven and Schubert through the use of the instruments of Streicher and Graf are also long familiar. But a great deal remains to be learnt about those pianos that continued their rapid technological development in the wake of Sébastien Érard's double-escapement patent of 1821, and that had such a profound influence on the music of Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt.

All the more welcome then are the efforts by artists like Edoardo Torbianelli, a Trieste native who teaches at the Schola Cantorum in Basel and Berne's Hochschule der Künste, and who is associated with the Royaumont Foundation. Here he plays late Chopin works on a grand piano by Ignace Pleyel of 1842.

Immediately apparent is the instrument's reduced dynamic spectrum. An explosive *fortissimo* of the magnitude we've become accustomed to on the modern Steinway would simply render this piano mute. Thus the player is dependent on myriad other strategies for dynamic contrast. The phrase shape assumes much greater importance. Naturally the sophisticated properties of the Pleyel offer many compensations, including an almost incalculably richer overtone series due to the less tautly strung strings on an instrument built before the introduction of the iron frame, universal today.

The more rapid decay of sound also allows for greater clarity of inner voices, foregrounding Chopin as the consummate contrapuntist we know him to be from a mere glance at the scores. A very different sort of *cantabile* playing is also possible, particularly evident here in Torbianelli's exquisite reading of the two Op 62 Nocturnes. Pacing and dramatic emphasis in the B minor Sonata receive a bracingly fresh look. The delicate haze enveloping the opening measures of the *Polonaise-fantaisie*, dampers up, is the best testimony I know to the fact that the modern piano may be a more durable, louder instrument better able to hold its tune, but it is in no way qualitatively superior to the instruments that inspired the masterpieces of Chopin and Liszt.

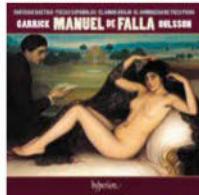
Of course these observations would not be applicable to performances by anyone less than a master of the instrument, not to mention by an interesting, cultivated musician. Fortunately, Torbianelli is all these things and more. Highly recommended. **Patrick Rucker**



Sublimely perceptive: Ning Feng brings expressive scope and emotional potency to Bach – see review on page 56

## Falla

Cuatro Piezas españolas. El sombrero de tres picos. Canto de los remeros del Volga. El Amor brujo. Homenaje 'pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy'. Segunda Danza española. Fantasia Baética  
**Garrick Ohlsson pf**  
Hyperion © CDA68177 (70' • DDD)



Garrick Ohlsson seems to be on a roll lately. He's recording more prolifically than ever and is constantly expanding his recorded repertoire. Ohlsson may not inhabit Manuel de Falla's sultry and exuberant piano-writing as Alicia de Larrocha or Javier Perianes do, yet he embraces the idiom with ease and fluidity, and leaves few small details unnoticed. In the *Cuatro Piezas españolas*, for example, Ohlsson emphasises the rhythmic kick and guitar-like flourishes in both 'Aragonesa' and 'Cubana', while generating quiet tension in the desolately lyrical outer sections of 'Montañesa'. If Ohlsson slightly underplays the brash accents in 'Andaluza', he clearly relishes relentless virtuosic left-

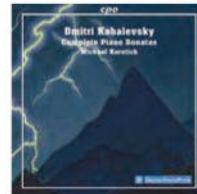
hand octaves, as one might expect from a seasoned Lisztian. Of the three pieces from *El sombrero de tres picos*, 'Danza de la molinera', stands out for the way his measured tempo allows the embellishments and flourishes to truly speak. And Falla's brooding treatment of the 'Song of the Volga Boatmen' acquires extra gravitas and sustaining power in Ohlsson's powerful hands.

The five pieces from *El Amor brujo* are less consistent: Ohlsson's 'Ritual Fire Dance' is textually scrupulous yet interpretatively stiff and studio-bound, while his fast and methodical spin through 'Canción del fuego fatuo' hardly hints at the music's underlying allure. But the stark *Pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy* (transcribed for piano by Falla from his original solo guitar score) benefits from Ohlsson's austere precision; quite different from *Segunda Danza española*'s controlled abandon. Ohlsson holds the large-scale *Fantasia Baética* quite well, with a keen ear for dynamic contrast and uncovering inner voices within thicker textures. That said, the greater variety of articulation and nuance in Alicia de Larrocha's Decca recording better vivifies this magnum opus, moving it bracingly forwards. Roger

Nichols provides scholarly and informative annotations, and the engineering is first-class. **Jed Distler**

## Kabalevsky

'Complete Piano Sonatas & Rondos'  
Piano Sonatas - No 1, Op 6; No 2, Op 45; No 3, Op 46. Rondo, Op 59. Recitative & Rondo, Op 84  
**Michael Korstick pf**  
CPO © CPO555 163-2 (64' • DDD)



Prognosticating the future reputation of a composer, particularly one who died as recently as 30 years ago, is always risky. In my childhood, the name Dmitry Kabalevsky was a fixture on required repertoire lists for young pianists. Even today this highly decorated Soviet composer is most often thought of as the junior member of a trio, including Kodály and Orff, who devoted significant energies to musically educating the young. The indefatigable Michael Korstick is among those who feel that Kabalevsky deserves a fresh listen, if not a revaluation. Having recorded Kabalevsky's works for piano and



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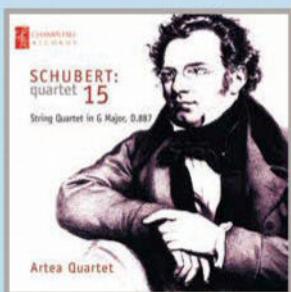
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piano

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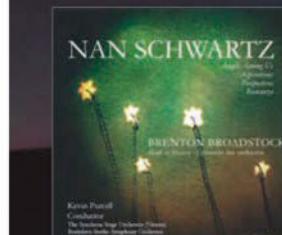
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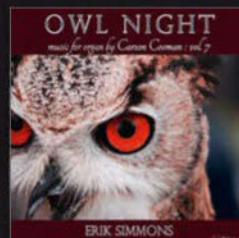
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orchestra in 2012, Korstick now follows up with a disc devoted to the three sonatas and two of the rondos.

Korstick copes manfully with the problems the sonatas present, and there are many of them. The First Sonata is a student work, dating from 1927, Kabalevsky's first year as a pupil of Myaskovsky. Here the extreme tempos required in the outer movements make almost any attempt to clarify the dense textures an exercise in futility. But an even greater problem with all three works is their failure to achieve an original voice. Scriabin and Rachmaninov seem to lurk behind the First Sonata and the Second, from 1945, recalls Heinrich Neuhaus's description of Kabalevsky as the 'poor man's Prokofiev'. While the Third Sonata achieves greater stylistic cohesion, one is reminded that, even though a handful of pianists outside the Soviet Union played the Second and Third Sonatas soon after their publication, Moiseiwitsch and Horowitz among them, they have failed to gain a foothold in the repertory.

The two rondos find Kabalevsky in more congenial waters. Op 59 was the commissioned work for the 1958 Tchaikovsky Competition which catapulted Cliburn to fame, while the Recitative and Rondo dates from 1967. Korstick's virtuoso performances of both are the highlights of the disc.

**Patrick Rucker**

### Prokofiev · Stravinsky

**Prokofiev** Romeo and Juliet - Ten Pieces, Op 75  
**Stravinsky** Three Movements from Petrushka. The Firebird (arr Agosti)

**David Jalbert** pf

ATMA Classique Ⓜ ACD2 2684 (59' • DDD)



In Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka*, David Jalbert begins the

'Russian Dance' at a promising clip, only to slightly slow down after the first eight bars. While there's nothing laboured about Jalbert's precise, well-modulated pianism, it doesn't match Yuja Wang's crisper, more playful and supple reading, let alone Pollini's reference interpretation. By contrast, Jalbert assiduously gauges the quick mood-changes in 'Petrushka's Cell'; listen in particular to the delicacy of his grace notes in the *Andantino* (about 1'32" into the movement). Jalbert's 'Shrovetide Fair' may not be the most shimmering or

exuberant on disc, yet his scrupulous balancing of the accordion-like textures and rhythmic exactitude impress. At bar 95, Jalbert follows Stravinsky's orchestral score by interpolating his own arrangement of 'Bear Dance'; Stravinsky omitted this passage in his transcription.

Jalbert proves more extrovert and incisive in excerpts from Guido Agosti's *Firebird* transcription. What colour and motoric momentum he brings to the 'Danse infernale', contrasting with his caressingly flexible treatment of the Berceuse. The finale's opening tremolos are differentiated in regard to voicing and touch, helping to build the movement to an exultant climax.

Better still are the 10 pieces that Prokofiev arranged from his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. It's ironic how Jalbert's readings are so vividly and diversely detailed from a pianistic standpoint, yet one almost doesn't notice the instrument. In 'The Street Awakens', for example, Jalbert's minute gradations of touch in the detached phrases evoke an agile woodwind section, while his brisk, long-lined treatment of 'The Arrival of the Guests' is a real minuet, rather than the heavy-handed clog dance one often hears. By keeping the dashing scales of 'The Young Juliet' on an even keel, Jalbert allows you to hear the air between the rapid notes. The pianist underlines the final movement's expressive points by judiciously contouring the music's polyphony and using discreet rubato, thereby shaving off a minute or two from slower, more superficially emotive renditions. A worthwhile disc, overall, even if *Petrushka*'s first two movements could have been better. **Jed Distler**

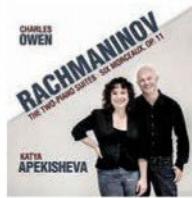
### Rachmaninov

Suites<sup>a</sup> - No 1, 'Fantaisie-tableaux', Op 5;

No 2, Op 17. Six Morceaux, Op 11<sup>b</sup>

**Charles Owen, Katya Apeksheva** <sup>bpf</sup><sup>a</sup>pfs

Avie Ⓜ AV2381 (70' • DDD)



I began with Suite No 2 for no other reason than I felt like listening to something robust and bracing. And that is exactly what I got – a muscular, tightly synchronised and rhythmically perky account of this wonderful score. It was recorded in the concert hall at Kings Place, London, a good choice for two reasons: first, the acoustic is neither studio-dry or resonantly awash, while airy enough to capture the music's busy detail

and the wide dynamic range of the two Steinways; second, the venue is where Owen and Apeksheva hold their now annual London Piano Festival, which they founded in 2016.

The two have been playing together for just over 30 years, and it shows: the subtle give-and-take, the wonderfully precise ensemble and the feel of long acquaintance with the music. If Argerich and Freire remain *sui generis* in the Tarantelle finale, storming home in 5'30", a full 40 seconds ahead of the newcomers (their triplet repeated notes at *presto* are quite something), Owen and Apeksheva offer a convincing alternative.

To then go to the Barcarolle of Suite No 1 presents a pleasant surprise for here the duo conjure up a quite different palette of colours, Impressionistic almost, and highly atmospheric. Where the repeated figuration of this movement can sometimes make it seem overlong, one was happy to drift along, as it were, with the narrative of the Lermontov poem that inspired it. No less successful are the duo's responses to the other three 'musical pictures' (the composer's description), culminating in that extraordinary and joyful depiction of Easter bells.

Even though there is no record of Rachmaninov himself playing the *Six Morceaux* of 1894 either in public or in private – as Julian Haylock in his booklet note posits, it is almost as though he tried to disown them – it seems that 'he couldn't help but produce music of captivating enchantment'. Quite right. Personally, I would have placed these piano duets after Suite No 1 but it does provide the duo with a suitably triumphant conclusion to their highly recommendable disc with a rousing account of 'Slava!'. **Jeremy Nicholas**

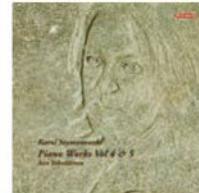
### Szymanowski

Piano Works, Vols 4 & 5

Twenty Mazurkas, Op 50 - Nos 5-8, 17-20. Piano Sonata No 1, Op 8. Four Polish Dances. Prelude and Fugue. Romantic Waltz. Twelve Studies, Op 33. Variations, Op 3. Variations on a Polish Folk Tune, Op 10

**Anu Vehviläinen** pf

Alba Ⓜ ABED407 (120' • DDD)



Karol Szymanowski was neither one of the 20th century piano-virtuosos-composers on the model of Bartók or Prokofiev nor an ardent self-publicist of Stravinsky's ilk. For the longest time,



Lise de la Salle revels in Liszt's galvanic rhetoric in her Bach-themed programme - see review on page 64

if one were curious about his piano music, one had recourse to the recordings of his compatriots, Rubinstein and Małcużyński, and little else. Gradually others came aboard, Richter in the 1950s, then more recently, a veritable groundswell including Anderszewski, Hamelin, Pöntinen, Tiberghien, Jones, Roscoe, Fialkowska, Blechacz, Lortie and many others both inside and outside Poland.

Among those for whom recording a few pieces or a single opus was insufficient, and who resolved to record all the piano music, is the Finnish pianist Anu Vehviläinen. Vols 4 and 5 of her series include works from each of Szymanowski's style periods: the first from 1900 until 1913; the second roughly coinciding with the First World War; and the third from his relocation from Ukraine to Warsaw up to his death in 1937.

It has become a commonplace to observe that from within Szymanowski's piano sonatas, a symphony struggles to emerge. In the case of the earliest of his three surviving sonatas, that 'symphony',

harmonically speaking, has a great deal in common with Brahms. Vehviläinen copes resourcefully with its thicket of over-written textures, replete with double glissandos and multi-voiced trills. It may be, however, that her intrepid pianism is shown in its best light in two of the four books of the Op 50 Mazurkas, which contain some of Szymanowski's most characteristic and mature writing for the instrument. She is also persuasive in the two early sets of Variations, Opp 3 and 10, in which the original voice of the composer is fleetingly heard amid allusions to Chopin and Scriabin.

**Patrick Rucker**

### Mark Hambourg

'Encores & Rarities - Selected

HMV Recordings 1910-1935'

*Includes music by Arne, JS Bach, Byrd, Blow, Bull, F Couperin, Debussy, Dvořák, d'Erlanger, Gluck, Grainger, Hambourg, Handel, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Moszkowski, Poldini, Poulenc, Rachmaninov, Ravel, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rubinstein, Schubert, Schumann, D Scarlatti, de Séverac, Scriabin, Sgambati and Wolf-Ferrari*

### Mark Hambourg

PF APR ⑧ ⑨ APR6023 (155' • ADD)



Like APR's earlier release of Hambourg's complete Liszt

*Hungarian Rhapsodies* (1/06 – a gramophone first), this selection of 49 different works (51 tracks) veers from electrifying to execrable, from inspired to banal. Try as one might to justify this pianist's shortcomings by placing them in a historical context, due either to technical failings or musical conception or sometimes both together there are some truly awful performances on these two CDs which none of his peers would have countenanced releasing (Hofmann, Cortot, Petri and Schnabel were Hambourg's almost exact contemporaries).

Look no further than the transcription of Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D, BWV532. Eugen d'Albert's intention was to transfer the organ's grandeur and

# GRAMOPHONE Focus

## SIMON PRESTON

**Marc Rochester** rejoices in the great organist's artistry and virtuosity on a bundle of reissues of his 1960s recordings



A dazzling demonstration of Simon Preston's art

Eight organs, 31 composers and 53 pieces of music lasting in total over 10 hours; a remarkable achievement from a single organist. Simon Preston may be one of the most frequently recorded organists but certainly he is one of the most compelling players of his, or any other, generation, as these nine discs (in five separate packages) so eloquently demonstrate. Here we have most of the iconic LP recordings he made for Argo/Decca between 1962 and 1970, as well as an unmissable extra. As the booklet notes put it, 'during the 1960s it often seemed as if a new Simon Preston organ LP appeared every few months'.

The one overriding impression we get from these performances is of astonishing energy, vitality and sheer *joie de vivre*. Everything has a smile on its face, everything seems just one step away from the dance floor and almost everything is delivered with spellbinding virtuosity. An unremitting obsession with pointed articulation could become

tiresomely aggressive were it not for Preston's intense musicality and insatiable good humour.

To understand the significance of these recordings, we should put them in their original context. With Ralph Downes's Royal Festival Hall organ of the 1950s, the Organ Reform Movement hit British organ builders and organists with a vengeance. Decades of thick, cloying organ sound and even thicker, glutinous *legatissimo* playing at elephantine tempos were swept away in a new era which emphasised the bright, brittle and buoyant. As organs lost their warm, fuzzy image, so too did organists. In the vanguard of this new world of re-energised organ-playing came Simon Preston.

The original Royal Festival Hall organ is, appropriately enough, included here with Preston's performance of Peter Maxwell Davies's *O magnum mysterium* on the two-disc set **20th-century Organ Music**. Preston's dazzling virtuoso display

does much to dispel Maxwell Davies's uncompromising musical language of the work's final organ fantasia. The movements which precede this, sung and played with more enthusiasm than polish by the pupils of Cirencester Grammar School, remind us how adept Maxwell Davies was at writing accessible yet challenging music for amateurs in the 1960s. This package also includes the three Hindemith organ sonatas. Preston plays them with great wit and charm on another pioneering instrument of the 1960s, the Walker of St John the Evangelist, Islington. Here organ and organist are in perfect synchronicity, and Preston's special ability to realise Hindemith's somewhat esoteric ideas for the instrument makes this a performance which does not just serve a historic purpose but stands as one of the finest recordings in the catalogues of these elusive works. I am rather less enthusiastic about the other works here, all recorded at Bristol's Colston Hall, where Preston tries perhaps a little too hard to inject vigour into Elgar's noble Sonata and is close to flogging dead horses in trying to bring interest to pieces by Tippett, Britten, Howells and Bridge.

Westminster Abbey was Preston's home turf for much of the 1960s, and not only did he record a huge variety of repertory on the instrument there but he had obvious affinity with the organ. This particularly fruitful relationship between organist and organ is celebrated on **Simon Preston at Westminster Abbey**. Alongside Bach's 'Schübler' Chorales – although Preston's pointed avoidance of legato touch seems rather dated to today's ears – come Mozart's two big clock pieces and a motley collection of short items ranging from a monumental account of Walton's *Crown Imperial*, through a wonderfully impudent romp through *The Prince of Denmark's March*, to an appropriately morose plod through the Dead March from *Saul*. I very much enjoy Preston's neat and precise delivery here of the finale from Vierne's First Symphony but the ubiquitous Widor Toccata seems rather too clean-cut to be really thrilling.

The Westminster Abbey organ also features on **Romantic Organ Music** with some heavyweight Reger and a spine-tingling account of the Reubke Sonata. Brahms and Franck are delivered in typically precise and intuitive performances, recorded at St Albans

Abbey and King's College, Cambridge, respectively. Preston's virtuoso flair comes into its own with the two big Liszt works – *Ad nos* and the *Fantasia and Fugue on B-A-C-H* – played on the magnificent organ of Hull City Hall.

Pride of place among these Eloquence reissues, however, must go to the earliest of the recordings, of **Messiaen**. It was these recordings made between 1962 and 1969 which effectively brought Simon Preston to international attention. *L'Ascension* (from King's, Cambridge), *La Nativité du Seigneur* (Westminster Abbey), *Le banquet céleste* and *Les corps glorieux* (St Albans Abbey) were memorable enough in their day but still stand as pinnacles in the Messiaen recorded oeuvre. These superb remasterings enhance what were already exceptionally fine recordings.

And what of that unmissable extra? Originally issued in 1988 in CD format, by which time Preston was as familiar a figure on the American organ scene as on the British one, he recorded a gloriously flamboyant programme on the Methuen Memorial Music Hall Organ in Boston, **Variations on America**. Pieces by Ives, Sousa and J Dudley Buck suit Preston's ebullient, effervescent style to a T; coupled with spectacular virtuoso showpieces from Bossi and Saint-Saëns, as well as Guilmant's First Sonata in a tremendously thrilling account, this is a dazzling demonstration of Preston's art. And if it all seems a little in-your-face, there is a deliciously sentimental wallow in Lemare's 'Moonlight and Roses' *Andantino*. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



### 20th-Century Organ Music

Simon Preston

Decca Eloquence **B** ② ELQ482 4925

### Simon Preston at Westminster Abbey

Simon Preston

Decca Eloquence **B** ② ELQ482 4933

### Romantic Organ Music

Simon Preston

Decca Eloquence **B** ② ELQ482 4941

### Messiaen Organ Works

Simon Preston

Decca Eloquence **B** ② ELQ482 4917

### Variations on America

Simon Preston

Decca Eloquence **B** ELQ482 8101

sonority to the piano, not to provide a mindless, scurrying *perpetuum mobile*. (Piers Lane shows, thrillingly, how it should be done – Hyperion, 6/10.) *Claire de lune*, with an average performance time of around five minutes (Giesecking, Bavouzet, dozens more) is here brushed aside in under three; the unsteady pulse of many numbers with their constant speeding up and braking becomes irksome. I could go on.

And yet, and yet. There is frequent evidence of a big personality, of an exciting expressive impetuosity and of fabulously fluent fingers (even if clarity is sometimes compromised by the acoustic process): *The Harmonious Blacksmith*, for example, and Moszkowski's Étude in G flat (Hambourg's 1929 recording preferred to that of 1909), even if Seta Tanyel's less flamboyant 1996 account is more musical (Hyperion, 12/96, A/02). Very often you will hear the beautiful singing tone for which Hambourg (and his fellow Leschetizky pupils) was famed: try Schumann's 'Schlummerlied', the Gluck-Sgambati *Mélodie* and 'Ondine' from *Gaspard de la nuit* (the first recording by all of 16 years, albeit abridged), all of them quite gorgeous.

Many of the rarer titles, too, have an undeniable charm (Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Dance of the Tumblers' and the Intermezzo from Wolf-Ferrari's *The Jewels of the Madonna*). Indeed, for pianophiles perhaps the greatest draw of this release is the repertoire. There are works by Byrd, Bull, Blow, Arne and Couperin (who else was recording them in 1915?); Leonard Borwick's transcription of *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* of which Hambourg gave the world premiere; first recordings of Rachmaninov and Scriabin; and works by Poldini, d'Erlanger and Anton Rubinstein – the pianist to whom Hambourg was most often compared – whose Étude in F, Op 23 No 1, was the last recording Hambourg made. That was in 1935, a full quarter of a century before his death.

In short, pianophiles should not hesitate over this invaluable cabinet of curiosities. Others should. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'Bach Unlimited'

**JS Bach Italian Concerto, BWV971 JS Bach /**

**Busoni Chaconne Enhco L'aube nous verra.**

**Chant nocturne. La question de l'ange. Sur la route à Liszt Fantasia and Fugue on**

**B-A-C-H, S529 Poulen Valse-improvisation sur le nom de Bach Roussel Prelude and Fugue, Op 46**

**Lise de la Salle, Thomas Enhco pf**

**Naïve **F** V5444 (55' • DDD)**



The concept behind Lise de la Salle's 'Bach Unlimited' is to interweave music either written by or inspired by JS Bach. In turn, composer Thomas Enhco provides short pieces that comment upon and link the major works. Bach's *Italian Concerto* makes for an extrovert curtain-raiser by way of de la Salle's frisky outer movements but she doesn't equal Angela Hewitt (Hyperion, 3/01) or Murray Perahia (Sony Classical, 12/03) for refined contrapuntal acumen. Enhco's *Chant nocturne* purportedly relates to the *Italian Concerto*'s slow movement; it's actually closer to being the love child of Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' and Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*.

De la Salle's hard-hitting interpretation of Poulenc's *Valse-improvisation* misses the music's lithé and debonnaire point. The 'groove' set up at the outset of Enhco's four-hand piece based on the letters of Bach's name fails to sustain as the texture grows heavier with notes. By contrast, the Bach-Busoni Chaconne scintillates from start to finish, and is closer to Kissin's instinctive bravura (RCA, 12/98) than Hélène Grimaud's more structured, intimately scaled reading (DG, 2/09). Encho's *La question de l'ange* starts out as a two-part invention before reaching out all over the keyboard.

Roussel's Op 46 features a Prelude that's essentially Poulenc minus humour, followed by a fugue where the last note of the B-A-C-H motif is displaced up an octave, to caustic effect. De la Salle revels in the Liszt B-A-C-H Fantasia and Fugue's full-bodied keyboard deployment and galvanic rhetoric, although Marc-André Hamelin's extraordinary transparency and lightness remain the reference point (Hyperion, 5/11). The sparse serenity of Enhco's *L'aube nous verra* enables listeners to decompress and prepare for a soft landing to a fascinating, albeit uneven programme.

**Jed Distler**

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# Simon Holt

**A**rnold Whittall champions this British composer whose unique sound embraces art, literature, the sinister – even the ghoulish

**S**imon Holt, who turned 60 last month, belongs to a generation of British composers as celebrated for its distinction as for its diversity. With George Benjamin, Jonathan Dove, James MacMillan and Mark-Anthony Turnage all born between 1958 and 1960, neither avant-garde experimentalism nor wholeheartedly nostalgic conservatism are to be expected. Rather, varying degrees of edginess and incisiveness speak of distinctively contemporary expressive concerns and technical possibilities. Holt's music, too, has a dramatic immediacy and colouristic appeal indicating a healthy scepticism about overtly mechanistic systems at one extreme and pastoral nostalgia at the other. At the same time, the often forceful ruggedness of his materials, textures and processes reveals affinities with an earlier generation of British modernists, of which Holt's fellow Lancastrian Sir Harrison Birtwistle (*b*1934) is the leading representative.

Holt studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester with Anthony Gilbert – recent string quartets by master and pupil can be heard on the album 'Bracing Change' (NMC, 8/17) – and had his first professional successes in the early 1980s. At that time, Tippett and Maxwell Davies were especially prominent among contemporary British composers, yet the musical climate also owed much to a determinedly internationalist outlook, especially at the BBC and with such

*A very immediate and compelling sense of musical identity is to be heard across the 30 plus years of creative endeavour*

enterprising outfits as the London Sinfonietta and the Nash Ensemble. In this respect, Holt has something in common with another close contemporary, Richard Barrett (*b*1959), who like him has spent long periods living and working on the Continent. On the other hand, Holt has shown less sympathy than Barrett with the rhythmic complexities of Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy and James Dillon; and Barrett's direct involvement in performance (mainly in connection with live electronics) contrasts considerably with Holt's Birtwistle-like avoidance of the performer's role.

Holt also shares Birtwistle's interest in the fine arts, and made these a special study before switching to music. Although the musical results are never simplistically pictorial, visual materials have been vital sources of inspiration, from as early as *Maiästra* (1981) for solo flute (doubling alto flute), which references a mysteriously bird-like sculpture by Brancusi, and *Burlesca oscura* (1985) for clarinet quintet, the first of several works relating to Goya etchings. The Goya connection is an indication of Holt's close associations with Spain. He first set Federico García Lorca in *Canciones* (1986) and used a play by Lorca in his opera *The Nightingale's to Blame* (1996-8), first performed by Opera North (and which



Simon Holt: finds constant musical inspiration in the visual arts

sadly remains unrecorded). Holt's literary sources and allusions – which also include Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson and Antonio Machado – are nevertheless as diverse as his references to painters or sculptors; no artist has been more significant for him than the very un-Goya-like American abstractionist Ellsworth Kelly (1923-2015), linked to the orchestral pieces *Troubled Light* (2008) and *Ellsworth 2* (2012).

The sheer range of such extramusical promptings might suggest a consistent need to find validity for music outside music itself. But that is to ignore the very immediate and compelling sense of musical identity to be heard across the 30 plus years of creative endeavour which are, by now, reasonably well represented on disc. The steady stream of commissions Holt has received from the BBC, the Nash Ensemble, the London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and the Huddersfield Festival could portray him as a 'niche' establishment modernist, with his roots in early 20th-century expressionism and surrealism, and feeling most at home with the sinister, even ghoulish, prompted by Birtwistle's delight in night pieces and laments. Such an atmosphere is indeed to be heard in works with titles like *Black Lanterns* (1984), *Ballad of the Black Sorrow* (1988), *Sparrow Night* (1989), *Banshee* (1994), *Boots of Lead* (2002) and (because of its grisly scenario involving the martyrdom of St Eulalia) *Witness to a Snow Miracle* (2005). But the boldness and directness of

**HOLT FACTS**

**Born** Bolton, Greater Manchester, February 21, 1958  
**Education** Bolton Art College (1976-77), RNCM (1978-82)

**Teaching posts** City, University of London; Royal Holloway, University of London; Royal College of Music (composition professor since 2012)

**Selected awards** Royal Philharmonic Society award in 1989 for *Capriccio spettrale* (1988); two British Composer Awards: in 2004 for *Who Put Bella in the Wych Elm?* (2003), in 2009 for *A Table of Noises* (2007). Composer in Association with BBC NOW (2008-14).

**Holt on Holt** 'I wouldn't call myself a composer in the traditional sense. I'm just someone who is trying to make work that happens to involve sound and instruments and people playing it - that's very important for me. It's not an academic exercise ... I'm interested in the sculptural aspect of it and the work almost becoming physical - in the moment - like it's an object that we're actually watching.' (2015)

material and expression to be heard in all these scores keep Holt's music well clear of horror-movie clichés: and

even if he counts as a 'non-performer' among composers, he consistently demonstrates an acute ear for freshly minted sonorities allied to an unfailing sense of what is possible and effective when performers of the highest professional calibre are involved. Most striking of all is his ability to switch from uninhibited forcefulness to much more restrained, mysterious moods, and to achieve a coherent relation between these contrasts. In this one might occasionally detect associations with the music of Roberto Gerhard, who also found ways of connecting British understatement with Iberian impulsiveness.

Holt has written a substantial amount of strongly atmospheric piano music, as can be heard on Rolf Hind's excellent recital disc 'A Book of Colours' (NMC, 10/09). In a 2015 interview, the composer spoke of playing chords over and over until he feels he can 'inhabit' them as personal presences, something that conveys (to some commentators) an affinity with Xenakis. But he has also described his admiring response to the echoing spectra of Oliveros's large-scale Deep Listening project, in which long-sustained, cavernously resonant and euphonious harmonies create a mesmerisingly hypnotic effect. Since Oliveros is usually thought of as being on the 'experimental' wing of the contemporary compositional spectrum, this reinforces the relevance of Holt's self-confessed resistance to anything that characterises him as a composer 'in the traditional sense'.

He goes on to describe musical compositions (even those which set or refer to verbal texts) as resembling sculptural objects to be observed from multiple vantage points. A composer 'in the traditional sense' might rather support the relatively common view of music as a language, the basis for eloquent oratory.

Holt's wish to rethink the nature of composition does not, it would appear, lead to the kind of questioning of the very nature of music itself that experimentalists such as John Cage and Christian Wolff have advocated. Holt works with, rather than against, well-established performing institutions and the traditional environment of concert and operatic stage, the more effectively to challenge the long-lasting premisses of such traditions. Thus his music-theatre piece *Who Put Bella in the Wych Elm?* (2003) brings some of the instrumentalists directly into the action. And works that present themselves initially as conventionally generic, like the violin concerto *Witness to a Snow Miracle* or the bassoon clarinet concerto *Joy Beast* (2016), written for Mark Simpson, have aspects of theatricality about their character and presentation that need to be seen as well as heard. Holt vividly reconfigures the conventional association between solo display by an onstage protagonist and more overtly interactive virtuosity in which the character of the soloist-protagonist is defined as much by how the other players react as by the soloist's own material. From *Walking with the River's Roar* (1991, revised 2006 and 2016) for viola and orchestra, to *Morpheus Wakes* (2011) for flute and orchestra without violins, and on to *Joy Beast*, Holt's concertos are among the most original and enterprising on the contemporary scene. More recordings of them would be a particularly welcome addition to the Holt discography. 6

**HOLT ON DISC**

Works that span his career from the 1980s to the present

**...Era madrugada. Canciones. Shadow Realm. Sparrow Night**

Fiona Kimm *mezzo* Gareth Hulse *ob* Nash Ensemble / Lionel Friend NMC (5/93)

The first of NMC's Holt discs contains four of his most vividly imaginative night pieces from the 1980s. All were premiered by the Nash Ensemble, and were recorded here in 1991.

**'Boots of Lead - Feet of Clay'**

Rinat Shaham *mez* Ulrich Heinen *vc* Rolf Hind *pf* BCMG / Martyn Brabbins, Simon Rattle NMC (A/04)

Here are five works: four for chamber ensemble, including his earliest characteristic composition, *Kites* (1983), and the Emily Dickinson setting *Boots of Lead* (2002), recorded at its premiere; and one for solo cello - *Feet of Clay* (2003).

**'A Table of Noises'**

Chloë Hanslip *vn* Colin Currie *perc* Hallé Orchestra / Nicholas Collon NMC (5/17)

This offers powerful evidence of Holt's orchestral mastery. *St Vitus in the Kettle* (2008), a brief, abrasive scherzo, comes between two very different concertos. A *Table of Noises* (2007) makes a display piece for percussion out of a portrait in sound of Holt's taxidermist great-uncle, while the violin concerto *Witness to a Snow Miracle* (2005) evokes Matthias Grünewald's harrowing paintings and the youthful Christian martyr St Eulalia of Mérida. At once elusive and aggressive, the music on this disc encapsulates with special directness the rewards and challenges of Holt's highly personal sound world.

# Vocal



Julie-Anne Sadie welcomes a fine disc of Clérambault cantatas: 'Van Mechelen's emotional intelligence and vocal control are impressive, and he draws a rich seam of light and shade' ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



Hugo Shirley on Mark Padmore's return to Schubert's Winterreise: 'In the later stages of the cycle the tenor offers singing of remarkable patience, control and concentration' ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**

## JS Bach

Christmas Oratorio, BWV248

**Anna Lucia Richter, Regula Mühlemann sop**  
**Wiebke Lehmkühl contr** Sebastian Kohlhepp ten  
Michael Nagy bass Gaechinger Cantorey /  
Hans-Christoph Rademann

Carus (M) ② CARUS83 312 (152' • DDD • T/t)



Gone are the days when a *Christmas Oratorio* was a three-CD affair.

This one fits on two discs with room to spare for the original, secular version of the opening chorus, 'Tönet, ihr Pauken', which blows in like a late guest to the party with a strenuous insistence on more festive D major after the Passion-inflected close of the oratorio proper.

Only now and again does Hans-Christoph Rademann's sprightly tactus work against the *Affekt* at hand – in the gentle swing of the chorus to open the fourth cantata, for instance, where a businesslike spring also minimises the textural impact of buzzing natural horns. Sebastian Kohlhepp is also pushed for comfort in the same cantata's 'Ich will nur dir', though the aria's tessitura also lies a little low for him; he is otherwise a personable, engaging Evangelist, as distant from solemn Gospel reporters of old as (say) Jon Snow is from Sir Alastair Burnet, and right at home in the near-Eastern political machinations of the Fifth.

Otherwise the high-impact openings to the odd-numbered cantatas come off best, with crisp choral singing backed by playing that's as dry and crackling with purpose as ash twigs aflame in a winter grate. The tonal palette of both ensemble and recording tilts towards the treble; there is less body to Anna Lucia Richter's soprano than might be anticipated from her central contribution to Marin Alsop's superb *German Requiem* (Naxos, 9/13).

Sometimes not everyone is on the same page, stylistically speaking. In the extended 'Herr, dein Mitleid' duet, Richter and

Michael Nagy fit the short-breathed continuo but not the more *cantabile* line of the obbligato oboe. Star of the show is Wiebke Lehmkühl; perhaps not such a surprise in a work where (like Verdi's *Requiem* or *Don Carlo*) the alto sometimes seems to have all the best tunes. With her every appearance the sometimes frenetic pulse of the performance is centred and the work of her instrumental colleagues more focused; you can hear them listening to her. There is indeed an Erda-like gravity to her vocal presence that has already been refined onstage, and should further enhance the Royal Opera's next *Ring* cycle. **Peter Quantrill**

## JS Bach

'Secular Cantatas, Vol 9 - The Contest between Phoebus and Pan'

Cantatas - No 201, Geschwinde, ihr wirbelnden Winde; No 207a, Auf, schmetternde Töne der muntern Trompeten

**Joanne Lunn sop Robin Blaze counterten**

**^Katsuhiko Nakashima, Nicholas Phan tens**

**^Christian Immel bar Dominik Wörner bass**

**Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki**

BIS (F) BIS2311 (81' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Scant documentation on Bach's personal motivation and experiences

encourages us to look more deeply into why particular works exist. In the case of the opulent secular cantata *Phoebus and Pan*, Bach's new role from 1729 as director of the Leipzig concert club, Collegium Musicum, may have been the inspiration rather than the usual commission to honour a worthy. No 201 is indeed a piece of mesmerising ambition and scale, at nearly 50 minutes. The habitual congratulatory text is jettisoned for a political quarrel with genuine 'dramatis personae': Bach advocating proper musical art (essentially, his) over all the superficial flummery of the new generation, while at the same time having a dig at his employers.

Masaaki Suzuki has shown in his secular cantata series that he has the complete measure of how comic sensibility, dramatic moment and lightness pepper these scores with *galant* refinement. Here Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan alight on the swirling gusts clearing the ground in the spectacular imagery of the opening chorus, piquant winds providing gracious commentary to the alluring sensuality of Phoebus's apologia for urbanity in 'Mit verlangen', before Pan's subsequent agitated protestations. Both roles are strikingly well acted out by Christian Immel and Dominik Wörner and the subsidiary figures are equally pleasing.

One of the characteristics of recent Suzuki releases is the use of natural trumpets without modern tuning holes. This added 'authenticity', with its imposed limitations, provides an affectingly gamy intonation, a clucking timbre and generally more vocalised articulation. Be prepared for a degree of aural adaptation, as in the opening chorus of No 207a (ingeniously reworked from the first *Brandenburg Concerto* after an earlier secular work for a professor of law at Leipzig University) and in the framing movements of No 201. The concluding ceremonial march of the former has a particular tanginess which may bring us closer to a sense of what Bach would have heard.

This cantata is less evenly performed than *Phoebeus and Pan*, although the tenor Nicholas Phan really comes of age in 'Augustus' Namenstages Schimmer'. Overall, this is another distinguished release though not quite in the class of Vol 8 (A/17) – my Critics' Choice favourite for 2017. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

## JS Bach

Mass in B minor, BWV232

**Katherine Watson sop Helen Charlston mez**

**Iestyn Davies counterten Gwilym Bowen ten**

**Neal Davies bass The Choir of Trinity College,**

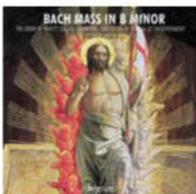
**Cambridge; Orchestra of the Age of**

**Enlightenment / Stephen Layton**

Hyperion (F) ② CDA68181/2 (108' • DDD • T/t)



Brightness and clarity: The Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, conducted by Stephen Layton, recording Bach's B minor Mass in their own handsome chapel



When Jonathan Freeman-Attwood reviewed the rather good B minor Mass from Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo (11/14), he spoke of it plugging an 'obvious gap' in Hyperion's Bach catalogue. He was probably not to know that within four years the label would be issuing another B minor, not only sharing one of the same soloists (and, for the record, one choral singer and two players), but also the same production team. Yet Stephen Layton and Trinity College Choir had already given them an attractive *Christmas Oratorio* (11/13), and presumably that was considered good enough on its own terms for the students to have their own go at this most chorally meaty of Bach's works.

It is certainly different enough from Cohen's grandly drawn reading not to tread on its toes. Recorded in their own handsome chapel, it has brightness, clarity and the kind of clean air about it that you are entitled to expect from a young mixed-voice choir. The overall ensemble is bigger than Cohen's, but the choir's sound is less firmly weighted and if in places less vocally assured, perhaps more natural. Which is

not to say that Layton leaves the music to do all the work. The steady opening 'Kyrie' is carefully shaped, both in its local phrasing – the articulation here as elsewhere precise and to-the-point yet never obtrusively over-clipped – and in the well-judged, sometimes almost dreamy rise and fall of its longer-term contours. In the 'Gloria' a strong change is made at 'Et in terra pax', as there is instead of the usual *accelerando* slide at the junction between the 'Confiteor' and the 'Et exspero'. The 'Sanctus' is imposing yet willowy, and in the grippingly built 'Gratias' and 'Dona nobis pacem' the trumpets emerge from the texture like petals from a bud.

A good sign for the future is that three of the soloists are former members of the choir. Katherine Watson, already a busy soloist, has a delightful baroque soprano voice – focused and accurate but always intelligent, sweet and lyrical – compared to which Gwilym Bowen, though undoubtedly a promising singer, is less secure and in the 'Benedictus' even somewhat pale. Helen Charlston has less opportunity to show herself off as Watson's mezzo partner in the 'Christe' but acquits herself with composure. Neal Davies is reliable as ever (indeed slightly smoother than for Cohen), but it is Iestyn Davies who serves up this recording's jewel in his first recorded

*Agnus Dei*, a masterclass in technique, vocal beauty and moving musicality that it is hard to imagine surpassed.

The only persistent niggle is that not everything feels in quite the same acoustic. The 'Kyries', for instance, seem more distant than some of the other choruses, while the solos are sometimes joltingly closer, and one wonders if this is to do with the particular conditions of recording in Trinity College. But overall this is a fresh and attractive B minor Mass, with plenty in it to enjoy. **Lindsay Kemp**

## Bliss

*The Beatitudes<sup>a</sup>. God Save the Queen<sup>b</sup>.*

Introduction and Allegro

<sup>a</sup>Emily Birsan sop <sup>b</sup>Ben Johnson ten

BBC Symphony <sup>ab</sup>Chorus and Orchestra /

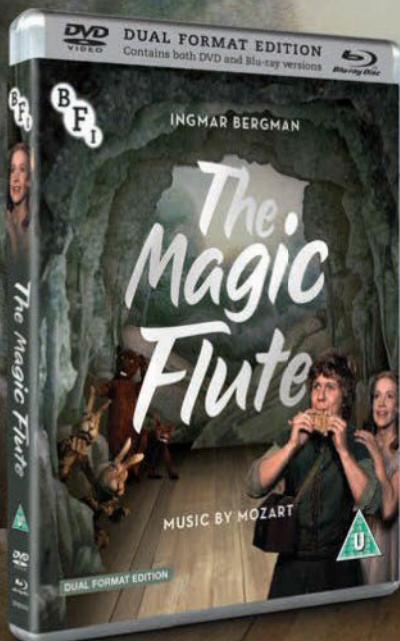
Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos F CHSA5191 (67' • DDD • T)



Commissioned for Coventry's new cathedral in 1961, Bliss's cantata *The Beatitudes* was destined to be overshadowed by Britten's *War Requiem*, and the fact that the work's first performance was relocated to the city's Belgrade Theatre

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(instead of the cathedral) did not serve its reputation well. Bliss was, not surprisingly, disappointed and hoped that it would, one day, be heard in the environment for which it was written. This did not occur, however, until the Golden Jubilee of the cathedral in 2012.

A hybrid work, like its forbear *Morning Heroes*, it consists of the nine Beatitudes from the Gospel of Matthew, interspersed with an anthology of 17th-century poetry by Taylor, Vaughan and Herbert (some of which will be familiar from Vaughan Williams's *Five Mystical Songs*), an adapted section from Isaiah and a poem by Dylan Thomas. Not only do these words provide a religious subtext but they also furnish a coherence to the Beatitudes themselves which otherwise, as the composer wisely adduced, might well have caused unnecessary monotony. Indeed, conversely, it is in the choruses of selected texts that the 'meat' of the work is to be found (for which the Beatitudes function, for the most part, as tranquil 'intermezzos'). To hear Herbert's 'Easter' and 'I got me flowers' (a beautiful elegy for soprano and chorus) in a quite different and poignant context is deeply moving. Bliss's unusual style of choral writing, its preponderant homophony dependent so much on harmonic variety and textural variation, contrasts effectively as an instrument enveloped by the composer's finely graded orchestration. Bliss's affinity for strong marches emerges in 'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled' (Isaiah) and his ability to create moments of rapt beauty is striking in Herbert's 'The Call', a part-song for chorus and orchestra. The orchestral Prelude and central Interlude remind us of the Bliss of *Checkmate* and *Miracle in the Gorbals*, an idiom where he excelled, and the Scherzo of this symphonic canvas is manifested in the angry setting of Thomas's 'And death shall have no dominion'. The final Beatitudes (5-8) form an exquisite foil to the violent orchestral Interlude but it is in the last part of the work, 'The Voices of the Mob' and the closing 'Epilogue' using Jeremy Taylor's 'O blessed Jesu', more Passion-like in genre, that the composer is most powerfully eloquent.

Andrew Davis clearly has a peculiar empathy for this music and the clean edges of Bliss's orchestral palette, complemented by some lovely playing from the BBC SO and the two soloists, Emily Birsan and Ben Johnson. This is also apparent in a most welcome recording of the virtuoso *Introduction and Allegro*, written for Stokowski (1926; rev 1937), a compelling mélange of serenity and contrapuntal tour

de force which builds on the brilliance of the *Colour Symphony* of 1922. **Jeremy Dibble**

## Clérambault

'Cantates françaises'

L'Amour, guéri par l'amour. Apollon.

Le jaloux. Pyrame et Thisbé

**Reinoud Van Mechelen ten A Nocte Temporis**

Alpha  ALPHA356 (72' • DDD • T/t)



If you're unsure whether to listen to a whole French Baroque opera, try

the cantata repertoire first. Considered the finest early 18th-century composer of these operatic miniatures, the Paris organist Nicolas Clérambault published 25, of which four are superbly interpreted here by the compelling Belgian tenor Reinoud Van Mechelen and ensemble A Nocte Temporis in their second recording in as many years.

Van Mechelen carefully chose the repertoire, not merely for the most suitable vocal writing but also to illustrate some of Clérambault's preoccupations: honouring the late, great monarch Louis XIV, illustrating in music the complexity of the emotions around jealousy and love, and encapsulating tragedy in miniature through mythic characters, in this case Pyramus and Thisbe.

From the opening track, the musicians perform with confidence, palpable rapport and style. Their keen attention to the detail and emotional nuances of the text and music results in a succession of arresting moments: from his entry in *Apollon* (track 2), Van Mechelen thrills by imitating the fluttering of birds' wings; in the first air (track 3), the instrumental prelude and interludes for flute and continuo conclude with a *petite reprise* in which the bass viol, played by Myriam Rignol, assumes the chordal role of the harpsichord to provide a more delicate accompaniment in keeping with the theme of *doux repos*; in the succeeding track the violinist Emmanuel Resche terrifies us with Clérambault's evocation of lightning.

Van Mechelen's emotional intelligence and vocal control are impressive. He seems to inhabit *Le jaloux* and *L'Amour, guéri par l'amour*, using his voice to draw a rich seam of light and shade from them. Among the highlights are the troubled *récitatif* in track 11, the passionate air in track 16 and the compelling *récitatif* in track 19. The instrumental playing here, as elsewhere, is expertly executed and perfectly balances the voice.

By the time you've listened to their *Pyrame et Thisbé* you'll be ready to tackle a *tragédie-lyrique*. Unfortunately, Clérambault didn't compose one. **Julie Anne Sadie**

## Debussy

'Songs, Vol 4'

Apparition<sup>a</sup>. Arabesque No 1. Beau soir<sup>a</sup>. Clair de lune (1st version)<sup>a</sup>. Chanson espagnole<sup>b</sup>.

Coquetterie posthume<sup>a</sup>. En sourdine (1st version)<sup>a</sup>. Fantoches (1st version)<sup>a</sup>. Le fille aux cheveux de lin<sup>a</sup>. Flots, palmes, sables<sup>c</sup>.

Jane<sup>a</sup>. Mandoline<sup>a</sup>. Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons<sup>a</sup>. Nuits blanches<sup>d</sup>. Pantomime<sup>a</sup>. Les papillons<sup>a</sup>. Rondeau<sup>a</sup>. Rondel chinois<sup>a</sup>. Séguidille<sup>a</sup>. Tragédie<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Lucy Crowe sop <sup>b</sup>Christopher Maltman bar

<sup>c</sup>Malcolm Martineau pf with <sup>d</sup>Jennifer France sop

<sup>c</sup>Lucy Wakeford hp

Hyperion  CDA68075 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Hyperion's excellent Debussy song series has evolved over the years from what was

originally a stand-alone recital by Christopher Maltman and Malcolm Martineau, released in 2003 (5/03). In Vol 2 (6/12), with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne, Martineau added the major cycles for female voice, while Vol 3 (11/14) found Jennifer France and James Rutherford tackling Debussy's settings of Théodore de Banville and Paul Bourget. The latter included some of the recently discovered early songs, written between 1880 and 1884, for Marie-Blanche Vasnier, and a further selection of Vasnier songs, 15 in all, dominates the latest volume, outstandingly sung by Lucy Crowe. France joins her for 'Chanson espagnole' for two sopranos; Maltman returns for the brief 1898 cycle *Nuits blanches*.

Throughout, we gradually become aware of Debussy's original voice emerging from his response to disparate influences. Some of the Vasnier songs clearly started out as fashionable display pieces in exotic or Orientalist mode. The melismas that pervade 'Rondel chinois' and 'Flots, palmes, sables', the latter scored for piano and harp, are reminiscent of Delibes's *Lakmé*, though the chromatic harmonies are already strikingly adventurous. There are three settings of Théophile Gautier, of which 'Coquetterie posthume', all emotional ambiguity and bittersweet irony, is the best. More important here, though, are the early Verlaine settings, some of which Debussy later revised or rewrote. The original 'Fantoches' ends with a coloratura passage of considerable

difficulty. The first 'En sourdine', meanwhile, is exquisite, and deserves to be better known. Crowe and Martineau also include the ravishing 'Beau soir', published in 1891 (we don't know when it was written) and close with Debussy's last song, 'Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maisons', written shortly before his cancer surgery in 1915, and angrily inveighing against the depredations of war.

In wonderful voice throughout, Crowe very much makes this repertory her own. Ascents into the stratospheres are all beautifully and securely accomplished, and those long melismas are tautly controlled and always expressive, never vacuous. Textual awareness and understanding shine through in the elegant wit of the Verlaine songs and in the reflective if intense Mallarmé setting 'Apparition', among the last songs Debussy wrote for Vasnier. She and France are delightful together duetting in parallel harmonies in 'Chanson espagnole'. Maltman sounds forceful and anguished in *Nuits blanches*, usually regarded as an adjunct to Golaud's music in *Pelléas*, though its murky, Sadean eroticism – Debussy wrote his own text – steers it closer, perhaps, to the eventually unfinished *La chute de la maison Usher*. Martineau, who has been the series' presiding genius, is a flawless Debussy interpreter, meanwhile, playing with infinite subtlety, nuance and colour. Exceptional. **Tim Ashley**

## Ludford

Missa Videte miraculum. Alleluia, ora pro nobis.

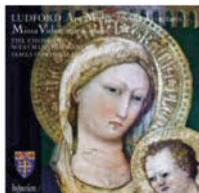
Ave Maria, ancilla Trinitatis. Hac clara die turma.

Ninefold Kyrie

**The Choir of Westminster Abbey /**

James O'Donnell org

Hyperion  CDA68192 (63' • DDD • T/t)



The modern reputation of Nicholas Ludford (c1490–1557) was really sealed by the first recordings of The Cardinall's Musick in the early 1990s (ASV Gaudeamus, 7/93, 12/93, 7/94, 1/95). These pioneering discs transformed Ludford from being considered a bridge – linking Robert Fayrfax with John Taverner – to one of the most prolific composers of Masses in Tudor England and a great pre-Reformation musician. Having been largely the preserve of specialist vocal consorts it's great to hear Ludford sung by the choir of Westminster Abbey, and this album joins another notable recent release by Trinity Boys

Choir (Rondeau, 12/17) to perform his music in a choral setting.

The opening *Ninefold Kyrie*, with nimble organ versets from old and new sources, showcases the smooth sound of the Lay Vicars, who comprise some of our leading consort singers. They forge a richly sonorous sound in the generous acoustic of All Hallows, Gospel Oak, and the organ (recorded in St Mary Undercroft, Westminster) offers a sprightly contrast.

O'Donnell treads a conservative path through the richly textured *Missa Videte miraculum*. In the *Gloria* the Lay Vicars create a luscious, serene opening which the treble voices later expand into a full six-part texture. The sound is wonderful, yet I notice they never fully capitalise on Ludford's ecstatic cascades of imitative writing, notably at 'Gratias agimus tibi'. There is a sense of some slight, almost statuesque withholding. Overall I find the treble sound more rounded than the Choir of New College's *Missa Benedicta* (K617, 8/08); and although I have a lasting fondness for the metallic feistiness of Higginbottom's choir, I do find that O'Donnell encourages really graceful long-arched phrases from his trebles and maintains an overall more consistent tone. The finest singing on this disc, however, is undoubtedly *Ave Maria, ancilla Trinitatis*: an exceptional work and a superb performance. The choir are heard at their finest in the more impassioned moments, of which this votive antiphon offers many.

**Edward Breen**

## Maconchy

Héloïse and Abelard

**Hannah Francis sop Philip Langridge ten Tom**

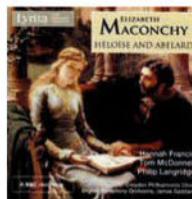
**McDonnell bar Croydon Philharmonic Choir;**

**English Symphony Orchestra / James Gaddarn**

Lyrita Itter Broadcast Collection  REAM1138

(72' • ADD • T)

Recorded live at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, London, March 3, 1979; BBC broadcast November 2, 1979



In his informative and substantial essay (unusually placed after the libretto in the booklet), Paul Conway describes Maconchy's 'dramatic cantata' for soprano, tenor, bass, chorus and orchestra *Héloïse and Abelard* (1977) as her 'magnum opus' and a 'consummate achievement'. Its mastery is shown not just in the handling – for most of its length with considerable delicacy – of the large choral and orchestral forces but also in its dramatic, even theatrical assurance. Maconchy composed

three one-act operas and three children's theatre pieces but – surprisingly for the composer who was arguably the finest word-setter of English after Britten – never received a full opera commission.

The three principal characters are drawn with acute sensitivity, real individuals, not just pencil sketches. Canon Fulbert, Héloïse's ambitious, self-seeking uncle, is caught superbly by Philip Langridge in this recording of the 1979 premiere, alternately importuning the brilliant Peter Abelard to become live-in tutor to his niece or hell-bent on his mutilation after the inevitable has happened. Abelard himself, self-righteous and un-self-knowing (despite his homily to his students to 'know yourself'), is revealed as all too weak in Tom McDonnell's strong performance. Star of the show is Hannah Francis's Héloïse, who develops from lovestruck student to the only person of moral strength in the drama. Her grief after Abelard's death is deeply moving.

This recording of the premiere, given in March 1979 (in the Fairfield Halls, Croydon) and broadcast by the BBC in November that year, is taken from Richard Itter's personal archive. The quality of the music and a very well-prepared interpretation from the Croydon Philharmonic Choir under their then director, James Gaddarn, come across well though the choral sound is congested in the louder passages; the nicely played orchestral accompaniment suffers less. Tom McDonnell's final aria (track 11, 'Abelard's Planctus') is marred 30 seconds from the end by an unfortunate but mercifully brief atmospheric noise. However, none of these technical glitches should detract from this wonderful work. It would be highly instructive to see it staged. **Guy Rickards**

## Mahler • R Strauss

**Mahler Kindertotenlieder<sup>a</sup>**

**R Strauss Tod und Verklärung<sup>b</sup>**

**<sup>a</sup>Brigitte Fassbaender mez Munich Philharmonic**

**Orchestra / Sergiu Celibidache**

**Münchner Philharmoniker  MPHIL0006**

(61' • ADD • T)

Recorded <sup>b</sup>1979, <sup>a</sup>1983



The catalogue already has a couple of recordings of Mahler's devastating song-cycle from that most devastating of singers, Brigitte Fassbaender. But this one, recorded live with Sergiu Celibidache in Munich in 1983 and now officially released in a new remastering on the Munich Philharmonic's own label, might well lay

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claim to being the most compelling, the most deeply moving.

It opens with a daringly slow account of 'Nun will die Sonn' so hell ausgehen' – nearly two minutes longer than Fassbaender's account with Riccardo Chailly and over a minute longer than that, also recorded live, with Klaus Tennstedt. It sets the tone of rapt concentration, of intense engagement with music that brings one deep into the heart of its painful, tender tragedy.

The other songs are less radically daring but no less moving. Fassbaender's concentration is compelling; the voice's characteristic richness and the inherent intelligence and emotional engagement of the mezzo's approach only gain in power by the remarkable steadiness of the singing, by an apparent attempt to maintain something like a stiff upper lip. But when the emotional floodgates are opened – at 'O du, des Vaters Zelle' (from 4'03") in 'Wenn dein Mütterlein', for example, or in the despair of 'In diesem Wetter' – the effect is overwhelming.

The playing of the Munich Philharmonic throughout is a model of concentrated, sensitive support, and the postlude to 'In diesem Wetter', in particular, is exquisitely realised. The Bavarian Radio sound is very good, too: it captures Fassbaender within an airy acoustic that presents the voice more naturally and less stridently than the Decca recording.

The Strauss coupling is in many ways fascinating, with Celibidache here pushing the piece's running time to half an hour. Parts of the performance are admittedly very slow, but elsewhere the conductor certainly doesn't shy away from putting his foot on the accelerator, sometimes rather alarmingly. He builds up the final minutes beautifully, almost hypnotically, but there are a few awkward transitions elsewhere, and too much for me that sags – at around the 12'25" mark, for example, after which a frantic *accelerando* leaves the band floundering, too.

The Strauss is intriguing, then, but it's Fassbaender's extraordinary Mahler that makes this an essential purchase. **Hugo Shirley**

*Mahler – selected comparisons:*

Fassbaender, DSO Berlin, Chailly

(4/94<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 473 725-2DF2

Fassbaender, NDR SO, Tennstedt (PROF) PH13058

## Martinů

### 'Madrigals'

Madrigals, H380. Primrose, H348. Czech Madrigals, H278. Three Sacred Songs, H339. Four Songs about the Virgin Mary, H235. Five Czech Madrigals, H321

**Martinů Voices / Lukáš Vasilek**

Supraphon (SU4237-2 (60' • DDD • T/t)



This is a delight. Martinů's chamber choral music is hardly well known even among specialists, so this beautifully performed anthology of music spanning the years 1934–1959 is a genuine revelation. The title 'Madrigals' is used as a generic name for the disc: while much of the music here is secular, there are also two devotional cycles, and while most of it is unaccompanied, one cycle includes violin, and another violin and piano.

The disc opens with the composer's latest cycle, *Madrigaly*, for soprano solo and mixed choir, of which the most remarkable is certainly the third, the lamenting 'Na tom světě nic stálého' ('Nothing lasts in this world'), but the cycle *Petrklič* ('Primroses'), from five years earlier, is consistently ear-catching in the interplay between female voices, violin and piano. No mere salon music, this is a colourful and absorbing distillation of Moravian folk song.

The *Czech Madrigals* date from 1939 and are thus contemporary with the *Field Mass*. The composer was not entirely satisfied with them but they were nonetheless given a first performance by the extraordinary Prague Madrigalists under the indefatigable conductor Miroslav Venhoda in 1965; the chamber approach of Martinů Voices is certainly more congenial to them than the vast resources of the Madrigalists but Venhoda's spirit hovers beneficially over them nonetheless. It must be said that they are somewhat uneven in quality, but there are several that are truly memorable, perhaps especially the third, the moving *Daj mi, Bože* ('Let me know, Lord').

From 1951 come the lovely *Three Sacred Songs* for female chorus and violin. There are many observations to be made about Moravian tradition here, the composer making himself a link in a chain including Janáček and Iva Bitová, but even if you know nothing of that you will still be astonished by their rapt beauty. The unaccompanied *Four Songs about the Virgin Mary* date from 16 years earlier and are more conventional in many ways, but are nonetheless powerfully affecting expressions of folk devotion (perhaps 'The Virgin Mary's Breakfast' is the most touching). Finally, the *Five Czech Madrigals*, from 1948, give us the madrigalian Martinů at the height of his powers, alert to every nuance of the text and producing short settings of tremendous, concentrated power and great beauty – I defy any

listener not to be astounded by the brilliant universe contained in a grain of sand that is the first of them, 'The message delivered by the dove'.

Performances are outstanding throughout. The voices are fresh and responsive, and Lukáš Vasilek once again proves that he is a true master of choral conducting. There is also an excellent, detailed booklet note by Vít Zouhar.

**Ivan Moody**

## Medtner

### 'Songs'

Three Romances, Op 3 – No 1, By the gate of a holy cloister<sup>a</sup>; No 2, I have outlived my desires<sup>a</sup>. Nine Songs after Goethe, Op 6 – No 1, Wanders Nachtlied II<sup>b</sup>; No 2, Mailied<sup>c</sup>; No 4, Elfenliedchen<sup>d</sup>; No 4, Im Vorübergehen<sup>c</sup>; No 5, Aus Claudine von Villa-Bella<sup>b</sup>; No 6, Aus Erwin und Elmire I<sup>c</sup>. Two Poems, Op 13 – No 1, Winter Evening<sup>a</sup>; No 2, Epitaph<sup>d</sup>. Twelve Songs after Goethe, Op 15 – No 1, Wanders Nachtlied I<sup>b</sup>; No 3, Selbstbetrug<sup>d</sup>; No 6, Vor Gericht<sup>d</sup>; No 7, Meeressstille<sup>c</sup>; No 8, Glückliche Fahrt<sup>c</sup>. Six Poems after Goethe, Op 18 – No 4, Mignon<sup>d</sup>; No 5, Das Veilchen<sup>c</sup>; No 6, Jägers Abendlied<sup>d</sup>. Eight Poems, Op 24 – No 1, Day and Night<sup>a</sup>; No 2, The Willow<sup>e</sup>; No 4, Twilight<sup>d</sup>; No 5, I am struck dumb<sup>f</sup>; No 7, A whisper, a shy breath<sup>a</sup>. Seven Poems, Op 28 – No 1, Unexpected Rain<sup>a</sup>; No 2, Whenever I hear birdsong<sup>d</sup>; No 3, The Butterfly<sup>d</sup>; No 6, I sit, thoughtful and alone<sup>b</sup>. Seven Poems after Pushkin, Op 29 – No 2, The Singer<sup>e</sup>; No 3, Lines Written During a Sleepless Night<sup>b</sup>; No 6, The Rose<sup>b</sup>; No 7, The Incantation<sup>b</sup>. Six Poems, Op 32 – No 1, The Echo<sup>a</sup>; No 4, I loved you<sup>f</sup>; No 5, Can I ever forget that sweet moment?<sup>f</sup>. Six Poems after Pushkin, Op 36 – No 1, The Angel<sup>f</sup>; No 2, The Flower<sup>e</sup>; No 3, As soon as roses wilt<sup>e</sup>; No 4, Spanish Romance<sup>f</sup>; No 6, Arion<sup>e</sup>. Five Poems, Op 37 – No 1, Sleeplessness<sup>d</sup>; No 2, Tears<sup>e</sup>; No 4, Waltz<sup>e</sup>. Four Poems, Op 45 – No 1, Elegy<sup>f</sup>; No 2, The Cart of Life<sup>f</sup>; No 4, Our Time<sup>d</sup>. Seven Poems, Op 46 – No 2, Geweihter Platz<sup>e</sup>; No 4, Im Walde<sup>b</sup>; No 5, Winternacht<sup>c</sup>. Seven Songs on Poems by Pushkin, Op 52 – No 2, The Raven<sup>e</sup>; No 6, Serenade<sup>f</sup>. Eight Songs, Op 61 – No 1, Reiselied<sup>c</sup>; No 3, What is my name to you?<sup>f</sup>; No 4, If life deceives you<sup>d</sup>; No 6, Midday<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Ekaterina Siurina sop <sup>b</sup>Justina Gringytė mez

<sup>c</sup>Oleksiy Palchykov, <sup>d</sup>Robin Tritschler tens

<sup>e</sup>Rodion Pogossov bar <sup>f</sup>Nikolay Didenko bass

**Iain Burnside** pf

Delphian (M) ② DCD34177 (144' • DDD • T/t)



The resurgence of interest in the music of Nikolay Medtner has tended to focus, understandably enough, on his piano works, with notable recordings of the



Harnessing passion: pianist Iain Burnside, here with mezzo Justina Gringyté, has masterminded a fine set of Medtner's songs

three concertos by Yevgeny Sudbin (BIS, 5/07, 2/10, 3/15) together with recitals of solo pieces by Hamish Milne (CRD and Hyperion), Geoffrey Tozer (Chandos), Steven Osborne and Marc-André Hamelin (both Hyperion). Many of the songs have yet to be rediscovered. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf used to have some of them in her repertoire, and there have been selections by Ludmilla Andrew and Susan Gritton on Chandos. But this is the first major panorama of Medtner's vocal output, featuring as it does 54 songs from his total of just over 100.

Medtner selected his poetry from the top drawer of Pushkin, Tyutchev, Lermontov, Fet and others in his Russian songs and, for the most part, from Goethe and Eichendorff in his German ones. Unlike his close friend Rachmaninov, Medtner set his German texts in the original language rather than in Russian translation. Unlike Rachmaninov, he continued writing songs after emigrating from Russia and settling in north London.

Iain Burnside, whose discs of the Rachmaninov songs (Delphian, 5/14) have earned wide acclaim, here assembles some of the same team for his Medtner compendium, with the soprano Ekaterina Siurina, mezzo Justina Gringyté, tenors Oleksiy Palchykov and Robin Tritschler, baritone Rodion Pogossov and bass

Nikolay Didenko. One of the many positive features of the Rachmaninov set was the way in which Burnside recognised the integral role of the piano parts – by no means mere accompaniments – in conveying the emotional nub of the songs. With the Medtner set this gift is even more noticeable and even more necessary. Knotty interpretative problems that run through Medtner's solo piano music are no less acute in his songs: in a booklet note Burnside amusingly quotes one of his singers as declaring, 'It all makes sense until you start playing!' It needs work and a great deal of stylistic insight (not to mention digital agility on the pianist's part) to appreciate how the vocal and instrumental lines complement one another. There is considerable complexity to the piano-writing in a song such as the gentle Pushkin setting 'Lish' rozy uvryadayut' ('As soon as roses wilt'), Op 36 No 3, incidentally misspelled 'uvryadayut' on occasion in the booklet. The sixth number in the same set, 'Arion', is another one of formidable intricacy; so, for that matter, is the fifth, 'Noch' ('Night'), though that one is not included here.

In all these songs Medtner is the same tone poet as in the piano *Tales* and *Forgotten Melodies*, but the close artistic alliance between Burnside and Ekaterina

Siurina in the Op 36 ones ensures that the music not only gels but also communicates palpable feeling and subtlety of expression. Burnside has enlisted singers who can bring an apt kaleidoscope of colour to this repertoire. The lyric tenor of Robin Tritschler is heard to radiant effect in several settings of Goethe and Eichendorff. Oleg Palchykov scales the dramatic heights of 'Ya potryasyon kogda krugom' ('I am struck dumb'), a Fet setting, Op 24 No 5, but can equally evoke tenderness in 'Ya vas lyubil' ('I loved you'), fourth in the Pushkin set, Op 32. The bass of Nikolay Didenko brings a telling note of introspection to his singing of Goethe, Pushkin and Tyutchev; there is a febrile urgency to Rodion Pogossov's interpretation of the Pushkin 'Zimniy vecher' ('Winter Evening'), Op 13 No 1, and the mezzo Justina Gringyté is delightful in 'Babochka' ('The Butterfly'), Op 28 No 3, as well as harnessing passion to the famous Goethe words of 'Mignon', Op 18 No 4. But this is just to pick out a few highlights from a set that is full of them.

Medtner is given a new, fresh perspective here, one that embraces his dual interests in Russian and German literature and reveals how it could ignite his imagination to create evocative images as well as keeping the pianist perpetually on his toes. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Monteverdi

'Clorinda e Tancredi – Love Scenes'

**Monteverdi** Bel pastor dal cui bel sguardo<sup>a</sup>. Ed è pur dunque vero<sup>b</sup>. Eri già tutta mia<sup>b</sup>. Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda<sup>c</sup>. Voglio de vita uscir<sup>b</sup>. Lamento della ninfa<sup>b</sup>. Maledetto dia l'aspetto<sup>b</sup>. Se i languidi miei sguardi<sup>d</sup>. Si dolc'è il tormento<sup>b</sup> **Sances** Usurpatore tiranno<sup>b</sup>

<sup>abc</sup>Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli sop  
<sup>acd</sup>Luca Dordolo ten <sup>c</sup>Riccardo Pisani ten  
**Cantar Lontano / Marco Mencoboni** hpd  
Glossa (F) GCD923512 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Step into the Danieli Palace hotel in Venice and, with a bit of creative imagination, it is possible to commune with the spirit of the first performance of Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. It was there, during the Carnival of 1624, that this experimental theatrical piece was given for the first time. Set at the time of the Crusades and based on an episode from the *Gerusalemme liberata* by Torquato Tasso, it involves just three singers and a four-part string and continuo accompaniment; the score presents these forces as two distinct groupings, with many of the sounds of the contest between the Christian knight and his Saracen lover dramatically represented through triadic trumpet calls and a whole series of innovative special effects.

Much of the challenge of a successful performance resides in the dominant role of the narrator. For any contemporary Venetian, the obvious background model must have been the storytellers who appeared every day in the squares of the city. Luca Dordolo captures their spirit superbly. His firm clear diction and sensitive rhetorical control, which at times almost moves into a kind of speech-song, extracts every last ounce of carefully calculated drama from Monteverdi's narrow vocal range, carefully constructed to emphasise the narrative character of the writing. The set-piece arioso passage 'Notte che nel profondo oscuro seno' produces a memorable, strongly projected performance, enhanced by sensitively executed virtuoso ornamentation, while Clorinda's affective and almost pathetic final interjection as she dies in Tancredi's arms is heart-rendingly captured by Lombardi Mazzulli. Following the spirit of Monteverdi's instructions, the *Combattimento* is prefaced by a sequence of solo songs and duets, while a further

group of late pieces and a fine though rarely heard song by Felice Sances complete the record. No serious Monteverdian will want to be without it. **Iain Fenlon**

## Palestrina

Missa Confitebor tibi Domine. Benedicta sit sancta Trinitas. Canticum Cantorum Salomonis - No 12, Confitebor tibi Domine. Introduxit me rex. Loquebantur variis linguis. Magnificat primi toni. Two Ricercars (attrib) **Yale Schola Cantorum / David Hill** with **Bruce Dickey** cornett **Liuwe Tamminga** org Hyperion (F) CDA68210 (70' • DDD • T/t)



This is really two quite separate discs. One has the 28 voices of the Yale Schola Cantorum, performing unaccompanied in Christ Church, New Haven, CT; and the other has the cornett and organ of Bruce Dickie and Liuwe Tamminga in the Basilica of S Martino, Bologna. The insert confusingly gives David Hill as director of both; and it gives no hint that two of the pieces Bruce Dickie plays are literal renderings of Giovanni Bassano's published arrangements of Palestrina (though the information is there in Noel O'Regan's useful booklet note). Beyond that, it lists the keyboard ricercars as only 'attrib', whereas they are clearly ascribed in the source, merely doubted in some circles because they were never printed and do not survive in Palestrina's hand.

The eight-voice Mass is of the *cori spezzati* variety, that is, with both choirs independently complete for singing well apart from one another, though that couldn't have happened in the Sistine Chapel (which had only the one choir balcony); and the recording here makes no attempt to separate the choirs, which is a slight pity. The other pity is that they follow the annoying habit of singing Palestrina's first *Agnus Dei* twice rather than adding a first or second *Agnus* in chant, which is presumably what Palestrina expected. But for the rest David Hill produces a marvellous sound from his choir, beautifully tuned, beautifully balanced and with many truly exciting moments.

Bruce Dickie is a totally authoritative player for the two Bassano pieces and two further Palestrina pieces; and Liuwe Tamminga plays with equal authority. These tracks are an unalloyed pleasure.

**David Fallows**

## Schnittke · Pärt

**Pärt** Magnificat. Nunc dimittis

**Schnittke** Psalms of Repentance

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir /

**Kaspars Putniš**

BIS (F) BIS2292 (60' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Schnittke's *Psalms of Repentance* constitute one of the most technically challenging works in the entire choral literature (having conducted them myself, I have total confidence in this assertion). Notes and chords must be plucked out of the air in the strangest of harmonic surroundings; there are lines of tremendous angularity, densely chromatic chords and ever-changing time signatures. The latter is because they are entirely dictated by the texts, which are not in fact psalms but spiritual meditations on repentance from the 16th century: for this reason, a better version of the work's title (*Stikhi pokayannye*) would be 'Penitential Verses', the designation that will be used in the new version to be published by the Schnittke Edition in St Petersburg.

This is not the first recording – there are four to my knowledge, the most exceptional of which is that by the Swedish Radio Choir under Tõnu Kaljuste (ECM, 5/99) – but it may just be the best. The Estonians have always rejoiced in a warm, rich sound and perfect blend, and guided by the utterly precise and dynamic Kaspars Putniš they give here a truly outstanding rendition that picks up every emotional and spiritual nuance with no sacrifice of technical perfection. Moments such as the blaze of major-key light in verse 4 or the pacing of the astounding climax at the end of verse 5, followed by the chromatic buzzing of the upper voices that opens verse 6, send shivers down one's spine.

This work has been waiting for choirs able to do this, because the technical challenges are not the most important thing about this music. They are there in the service of the text, and while it is hard-won, there is consolation to be found in this penitential reflection on life and death, illustrated most profoundly by the final movement, which is textless, and one of the most profoundly beautiful things Schnittke ever wrote.

Pairing this monumental work with Pärt's *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* is an inspired idea, moving as they do from darkness to light. The recording is superb, clear and never too resonant, and the booklet notes by Gavin Dixon are excellent.

**Ivan Moody**

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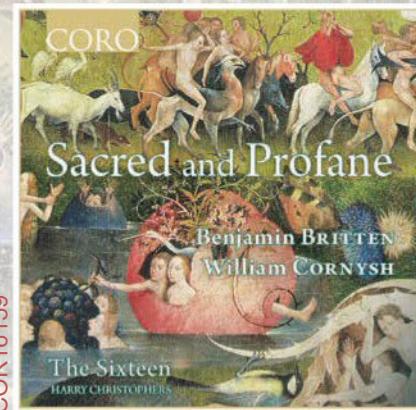
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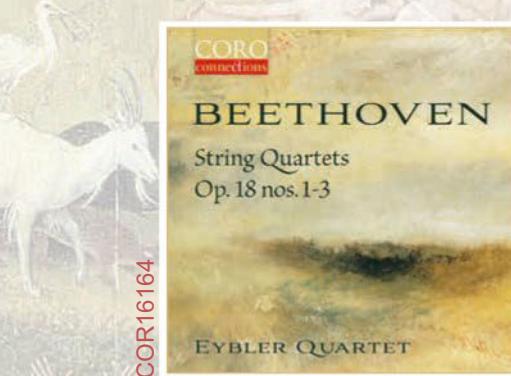
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**Schubert**

Winterreise, D911

Mark Padmore ten Kristian Bezuidenhout fp  
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2264 (69' • DDD • T/t)

Only a few months after Florian Boesch's second recording of Schubert's great wintry song-cycle (Hyperion, A/17), here's a second bite at the bitter cherry from another singer, albeit a very different one. With Mark Padmore at least there's been a longer intervening period: it's nine years since the release of his previous *Winterreise*, a 2010 Gramophone Award-winner, also on Harmonia Mundi. And there's a major difference here, too, in that not only is Paul Lewis replaced by Kristian Bezuidenhout but a modern concert grand is switched for a Graf fortepiano.

As with the earlier recording, there's a wealth of interest to be found at the keyboard. Here the instrument itself is beautifully mellow, with an especially tender *con sordini* sound as well as some brightness in the tone when required – not often, admittedly, in this most subdued of cycles. I love the hazy twang Bezuidenhout produces at the start of 'Der Lindenbaum', the wild clanging of the 'Wetterfahne' and the real sense he gives in 'Die Krähe' of the bird swirling ominously about. The melody of 'Frühlingstraum' is imbued with so much hope, that of 'Der Leiermann' with so little, its opening drone, played much as Lewis plays it, resembling less notes than just a pained, numb sound.

Bezuidenhout spreads his chords occasionally and offers a light sprinkling of ornaments, as does Padmore. And in the later stages of the cycle, in particular, the tenor offers singing of remarkable patience, control and concentration (listen to how he builds up 'Das Wirtshaus'). The final songs are moving, and Padmore's intelligence and seriousness are never in doubt, his interpretation always probing.

One notices, however, that the voice has lost some juice: he struggles to offer warmth to counter the blanched tone he employs elsewhere, while the lower register is underpowered. His German, too, is strangely affected, with vowels self-consciously opened up and consonants over-deliberate. The earlier recording, five minutes slower, features many of the same interpretative touches and characteristics, but they are more worrying here, less convincing. Matters are not helped, either, by engineering that places the voice in a strange quasi-ecclesiastical halo.

Padmore's fans will no doubt snap his new recording up, but I'd otherwise recommend sticking with the earlier one, featuring Lewis's warm, deeply human contribution at the keyboard. And if fortepiano's what you need, head to Christoph Prégardien and Andreas Staier for something altogether more grounded, satisfying and idiomatic. **Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparisons:*

Prégardien, Staier (12/97) (TELD) 0630 18824-2

Padmore, Lewis (11/09) (HARM) HMU90 7484

**Warren**

42nd Street

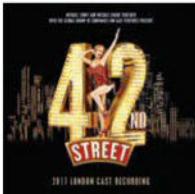
Sheena Easton VOC..... Dorothy Brock

Tom Lister VOC..... Julian Marsh

Clare Halse VOC..... Peggy Sawyer

2017 London Cast; ensemble / Jae Alexander

First Night © CASTCD122 (51' • DDD)



The sound of tapping feet invokes a whole era of classic Broadway and Hollywood

musicals, and when the curtain rises on this tap-infused extravaganza it pauses 18 inches or so off the stage to afford us our first glimpse of the source of that pulsing, kinetic sound. *42nd Street* is a show which grew out of the 1933 Hollywood movie but more importantly the songs of the great Harry Warren – one of the American songbook's most prolific but still unsung heroes. His name should be mentioned in the same breath as Kern, Rodgers and Gershwin but rarely is.

Since its first Gower Champion-driven stage incarnation back in 1980, *42nd Street* has acquired cult status as surely as it has gathered additional songs, and this latest West End offering in the very theatre which first hosted it – the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane – is a celebration as much as it is a revival. A musical about the creation of a musical at the height of the Great Depression could hardly be more symbolic of what musicals have always striven to do. The idea that you can, in the words of a song that Harry Warren didn't write, 'tap your troubles away' is at the very heart of this one.

So you may not be able to see the dancing feet but you sure as hell can hear them; and, as Jae Alexander's cracking band hurls itself into the rip-roaring Overture, trumpets flaring, saxes honking, the sound of an era is rebooted and refocused. This terrific 19-piece band – with trumpets led by the John Wilson Orchestra's Mike Lovatt – is in essence the pick of West End stylists and as good a reason as any for

acquiring the album. For the record, Philip J Lang's original orchestrations are expertly revamped and freshly minted here by musical supervisor Todd Ellison.

Sheena Easton was this revival's surprise casting – an erstwhile pop sensation from, some might have thought, the wrong side of the tracks boldly coming through as veteran Broadway star Dorothy Brock. She certainly has the voice (remember the Bond song 'For your eyes only') but more pertinently the style for songs like the gorgeous 'I only have eyes for you' and 'Boulevard of broken dreams', where the heartache peaks in her indomitable belt. Then there's Clare Halse's Peggy Sawyer, the fast-footed hooper who goes out a chorus girl and comes back a star when Brock takes a tumble; and the suave Tom Lister as all-powerful, he-who-must-be-obeyed Broadway director Julian Marsh, for whom the show will always go on.

But *42nd Street* will always be about the ensemble numbers and the orgy of tap that drives it from one showstopper to the next. 'We're in the money' and 'Shuffle off to Buffalo' could only have been written when they were written – and they really don't write them like that any more. And, of course, the two epic exponents of the genre – 'Lullaby of Broadway', with its thrilling segue from dialogue and Peggy Sawyer's cry of 'I'll do it!', and the title-number, both of which build and build to monster half-tempo reprises, the latter peaking with one of the West End's greatest spectacles as row after row of dancers come 'over the top' of what can only be described as the show's 'stairway to paradise'.

The lyric of the title-song goes like this: 'It's the rhapsody of laughter and tears, naughty, bawdy, gaudy, sporty 42nd Street'. Just so. **Edward Seckerson**

**'Equinox'**

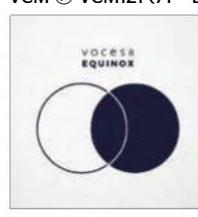
Anonymous Angelus ad virginem.

In paradisum. Requiem aeternam **Britten**A Hymn to the Virgin **Dove** In beauty may I walk.The Passing of the Year **Elgar** They are at restFauré Requiem, Op 48 – Pie Jesu **Lack** ThisEmber Night **Pärt** Magnificat **H Praetorius**Joseph, lieber Joseph mein **M Praetorius** Es istein Ros entsprungen **Stopford** Ave maris stellaTallis God grant with grace **Traditional Maria**

durch ein Dornwald ging

**Voces8**

VCM © VCM121 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Few ensembles put a programme together quite as well as Voces8. Thoughtful,



Cool and assured: Nigel Short directs the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Tenebrae in a 20th-century programme centred on Bernstein and Stravinsky

themed discs have become something of a signature for the British eight-voice *a cappella* group, and 'Equinox' might just be the most interesting yet.

Two – or possibly even three – cycles run concurrently here: the sacred cycle of the church calendar, the human cycle from birth to death, and the natural turning of the year from winter to spring. Somehow all of these arcs run concurrently through an eclectic programme that takes in everything from plainchant and Praetorius to Arvo Pärt, throwing up various echoes and intersections along the way.

At the centre of this beautifully produced recording is Jonathan Dove's substantial cycle *The Passing of the Year* (2000). It's a welcome choice. A contrast to the miniatures that frame it, it offers these skilful singers something more substantial to get their teeth into. The contrast between this recording and the 2012 account by the Convivium Singers (Naxos, 5/12) is revealing. Whatever the work loses in collective force and impact it gains in textural clarity, purity of intonation and the blowsy beauty of Voces8's sopranos, who gild Dove's fecund, at times rather over-ripe writing with the radiance it demands. The vertical clarity through the vocal parts – supported by the propulsive rhythms of the composer himself at the piano – is another bonus.

Other highlights include some graceful plainsong singing from the women of the

group, Philip Stopford's smoochy *Ave maris stella* (surely a modern classic in the making) and an unexpectedly effective *a cappella* arrangement of the 'Pie Jesu' from Fauré's Requiem. For a disc with broad commercial appeal, 'Equinox' smuggles in a good deal of musical substance. **Alexandra Coghlan**

### Symphonic Psalms & Prayers\*

**Bernstein** Chichester Psalms<sup>a</sup> **Schoenberg**  
Friede auf Erden, Op 13 **Stravinsky** Symphony  
of Psalms **Zemlinsky** Psalm 23, Op 14

<sup>a</sup>**David Allsopp** countertenor **Tenebrae;**  
**BBC Symphony Orchestra / Nigel Short**  
Signum F SIGCD492 (60' • DDD • T/t)



There is a coarse and forthright authority to the composer-led first recordings of *Chichester Psalms* (CBS, 12/65) and *Symphony of Psalms* (Columbia, 11/31) which is probably irrecoverable by modern ensembles even were they minded to make the attempt. Notwithstanding the careful inflections of the BBC SO winds and neat timbral blending of voices with instruments, Nigel Short's direction of the Stravinsky is plain and cool rather than hieratic. In Zemlinsky's riper setting of Psalm 23, it's Vladimir Jurowski (LPO Live, 11/17) who gets under the skin of the orchestration

(the trumpet fanfare at two before fig 2 apparently ignored by Short), even if the choral lines of Tenebrae are inevitably better defined in BBC's Maida Vale Studios than the London Philharmonic Choir in the Royal Festival Hall.

Where the studio production comes into its own is the close-miking of David Allsopp and BBC SO harpist Manon Morris for the central panel of the *Chichester Psalms*. It's good to hear Bernstein's original design of the solo for a countertenor being respected for once. Allsopp makes much more of the words than most trebles, and there is an arresting immediacy to both performance and recording: try the vertigo-inducing violins at the outset of the third movement.

However, both Tenebrae and Short sound much more at home in the acoustic of St Augustine's, Kilburn, for a remarkably assured account of *Friede auf Erden*. Like much of Schoenberg's work, it demands to be performed as if it were Brahms, neither by minimising the physical and technical challenges nor being overfaced by them. The parallel-third harmonies at 'In wie mancher heil'gen Nacht' are as remotely beautiful as they are hard to achieve, breathing 'the air of other planets' as ethereally as the Second String Quartet, or indeed Holst's 'Neptune'. As Webern exclaimed back in 1923, ever anxious to please his father-confessor, 'What a sound!'

**Peter Quantrill**

# REISSUES

**Peter Quantrill** on two huge sets celebrating American symphony orchestras and **Hugo Shirley** reviews an anniversary set devoted to the soprano Edith Mathis

## *Two of the US's greatest*

The Boston and Chicago symphony orchestras go head to head

**T**he scant contributions made by William Steinberg to the **Boston Symphony Orchestra: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon**, during his brief and illness-stricken spell as Music Director (1969-72), serve to press the case for him as the most under-recorded of great conductors in the second half of the last century. Less so in the celebrated 1970 Holst *Planets*, where shortcomings of idiom aren't compensated for by brilliance of execution as they were in the air-check of the contemporary concert performance, than in very live-sounding studio albums (replete with noises off) of Hindemith (*Mathis der Maler* Symphony and the Concert Music for Strings and Brass) and especially an incandescent 1971 account of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, kept on the move by rigorous yet supple tempi, superbly balanced with harp and timpani to the fore, and led from the front desk by Joseph Silverstein (strangely uncredited in the otherwise immaculate booklet), every bit the match of Michel Schwalbé and Leon Spierer for Herbert von Karajan in Berlin (also for DG).

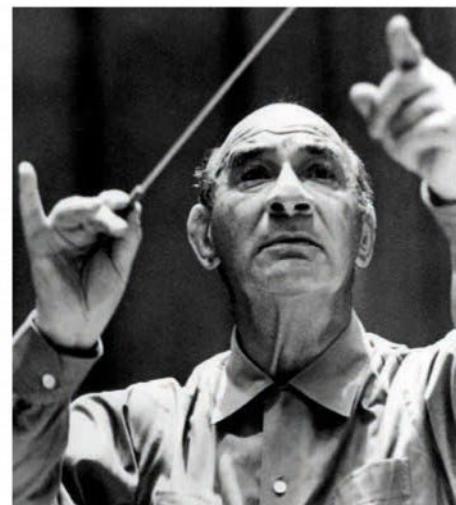
Part of the magic and profundity of Steinberg's *Also sprach* is the vivid sense of its human qualities, with all the principals seizing their chance to shine, not least

the cellist Jules Eskin and First Clarinet Harold Wright. In the slow movement of the *Unfinished Symphony*, it's again the unfussy *cantabile* of Wright's clarinet which commands attention; Eugen Jochum keeps hold of the pulse but otherwise lets his musicians do the playing.

Rafael Kubelík was another, more frequent guest from abroad than his presence in the set would imply. Their Smetana *Má vlast* together is the most urbane and least overtly 'Czech' sounding of all his recordings, with an irresistible solo from Wright as the warrior-maiden Šárka in her faked plight. The BSO has a lush sound, he remarked in an interview shortly before his untimely death in 1993, 'but we're not a loud orchestra. Maybe that's what conductors mean when they say we're the most European of American orchestras.'

For European, at least in this case, read French. DG's first recording in Symphony Hall was, appropriately enough, of Debussy (*Nocturnes*) and Ravel (*Daphnis et Chloé Suite*), with Claudio Abbado building on the heritage of Charles Munch's long stewardship to mould soft-focus if attentively sensuous performances in February 1970 and then, a year later, returning for more sharply profiled, stop-go versions of *The Poem of Ecstasy* and Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* (in recompiling the LP for the box, DG has jettisoned the original soft-porn cover, and a sleeve-note which opened with the striking gambit 'that sex was a human endeavour long before music').

Barely a month after Abbado's arrival, DG had returned (in March 1970) to record the BSO with its Assistant Conductor, the 24-year-old Michael Tilson Thomas. This resulted in a freshly minted *Winter Dreams* Symphony (No 1) of Tchaikovsky,



William Steinberg: with the Boston SO from 1969 to '72



MTT at 24: memorable Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky

and then (in February 1972) one of the driest, most clipped *Rites of Spring* to have been taped outside France: a performance of reliable and unexaggerated pulse that (for once) invites choreography. Also under Tilson Thomas is a Debussy collection (*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and complete *Images*) that, as Max Harrison observed of a 1979 reissue, was notable more for its refinement of execution than insight of direction.

You could say much the same for the bulk of the box, dating as it does from the





Seiji Ozawa, Music Director from 1973 to 2002, recording with Krystian Zimerman in Boston's Symphony Hall

30-year tenure of Seiji Ozawa. Particularly in those early discs of French music, the personalities of individual musicians are caught by the microphones, none more vividly than Doriot Anthony Dwyer, First Flute and indeed the first female section principal of any US orchestra. Her *Prélude* solo is ideally relaxed yet alert, and in *Daphnis* you can almost see Abbado keeping a lid on the strings to coax more of that peculiarly vibrant, tumbling tone from her, as if he was back in the pit at La Scala and she was on stage singing Amelia; it's worth finding on VAI, or YouTube, a 1962 Munich concert of the Ravel, at the conclusion of which he brings her to the front of the stage.

Dwyer, Silverstein, Eskin, Wright and several of their colleagues can be heard to still greater advantage on the six discs at the end of the collection, which present the complete Boston Symphony Chamber Players on DG. Mostly reissued since as fragments of larger composer compilations, this is one of the most valuable parts of the box: Debussy and the Second Viennese School receive 'engaging and accomplished readings' as Arnold Whittall remarked of one of those partial reissues (2/11), but the prize is a complete *Soldier's Tale* of Stravinsky, with an extensive English verse narration by Michael Flanders and Kitty Black, recorded up close so that Sir John Gielgud, Ron Moody and Tom Courtenay wheedle and banter in your ear.

Those strong musical personalities were not so much suppressed by Ozawa as integrated within detailed but often inert canvases of sound. There are featherbed Brahms symphonies and Tchaikovsky ballets, rhythmically springy, structurally well supported but somnolent. The opening fugue of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* drifts by in a mist of damp legato, considerably less purposeful

even than the early Berlin recording by Karajan. Made just four years after the Abbado, Ozawa's dawn from *Daphnis* is, by comparison, like drawing the curtains of a well-appointed bedroom: 'Shall I pour the coffee, madam?'

Highlights of the Ozawa years on DG include Teresa Berganza chewing the scenery in Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*, a Takemitsu brace (*Quatrain* and *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden*) and Respighi's Roman Trilogy, all compelling demonstrations in their way of the conductor's acute ear. He was once praised by Gunther Schuller as 'the perfect conducting machine', which says it all. Nevertheless, were I compiling a Best of Ozawa I would look first to his work in Berlin, Vienna and Tokyo with the Saito Kinen Orchestra.

## The golden thread running through the box is Solti's strength as a born and then trained director of musical drama

In William Furlong's *Season with Solti* (Macmillan: 1974), a Chicago Symphony Orchestra trombonist delivers the coup de grâce on the boss of the rival New England band: 'He's smart. He's studied all the moves ... But as far as an original mind, and there has to be originality to conduct because it's re-creating ... It sounds like a compendium of standard interpretations.'

Given the power-games played among the orchestras of most countries, the comment quoted by Furlong should be taken with as much salt as a Liverpool player's verdict on the Manchester United manager. Nonetheless, for a really menacing sense of purpose to Bartók's

string fugue, turn to Solti. Though the overall sound-picture is much less bassy than the Ozawa BSO recordings, made with the orchestra spread out over the floor of Symphony Hall, the presence of cellos and basses as moving actors is far more tangible and meaningful in Chicago.

With the conductor having been treated so handsomely by Decca in recent years, readers may well already have acquired one or other of several composer-themed boxes. What reason now to acquire the £280 *Solti: The Complete Chicago Recordings?*

There are (so far as I can see) no hitherto unreleased gems to get a discophile's blood up. More significant, however, is the opportunity to get under the skin of one of the world's great orchestras, and to observe every recorded detail of a creative partnership in maturation.

The first CD is the place to start: a Mahler Fifth from March 1970 (their first recording together) of febrile, claustrophobic intensity, sure to set the pulse racing. Adolph 'Bud' Herseth nails the trumpet solo with the insouciant bravado particular for years to him and the LSO's Maurice Murphy: Herseth and the oboist Ray Still are the orchestra's dominant personalities on record, especially during the first decade of the partnership. Recording levels are all over the place in the Medinah Temple venue which was deemed better fitted to requirements than the CSO's home of Orchestra Hall after its unsuccessful acoustic remodelling. However accidental, the eccentricities of balance serve to further squeeze and compress Mahler already at his most convulsive, and the mood of this Fifth on the edge of a nervous breakdown is only partially recovered by Solti's live remakes from 1990 (Chicago again) and in 1997 with the Zurich Tonhalle, his very last recording.

Given the later degree of identification between Solti and Mahler, at least in public appreciation, it's interesting to note how most of the cycle belongs to the very early CSO years, at a time when the conductor was still coming to terms with a composer whom he had (not alone among his peers) previously regarded with a good deal of suspicion. After years of critical reaction against what was perceived to be his blustery or over-heated way with movements such as the finales of the Third and Seventh, the circle may be turning back towards such an approach of wholehearted commitment and – crucially – flowing, vocally shaped lines.

Indeed the golden thread running through the box is Solti's strength as a born and then trained director of musical drama.

In the Nietzsche setting of Mahler's Third, there is touching care taken over matching both the shape of Samuel Magad's violin solo and the timbres of the horn section to Helga Dernesch's mezzo, even if the voice itself is not ideally steady. It is fitting that the single performing artist invited to contribute to the accompanying book should be Yvonne Minton. Right from the *Knaben Wunderhorn* Lieder on CD1, Solti partners her with total attentiveness and lack of ego, and it is her 'Abschied' that makes *Das Lied von der Erde* the high-point of his Mahler cycle.

Try Hildegard Behrens singing 'Abscheulicher!' in *Fidelio* and Norman Bailey in the Dutchman's narrative (another complete recording from the early 1980s) for more outstanding examples of a conductor both setting the scene and nurturing from his singers a fully realised and staged interpretation for the microphone. Minton remarks in her essay on his unfaltering grasp of rhythm; surely the significant factor in his untangling of texture to offer firm support to Barbara Hendricks in David Del Tredici's gloriously soupy *Final Alice*, Faye Robinson in Michael Tippett's *Byzantium*, and Barbara Bonney as the Young Girl in a luxuriously cast recording of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*.

## Time and again it's music with a story that brings the best out of Solti

It is Schoenberg's opera that most tellingly benefits from the determined articulation of the Chicago Symphony Chorus. Solti was always ready to sing the praises of the long-standing Chorus Director, Margaret Hillis, but an album of Verdi choruses is uncharacteristically stiff for him, and it is the choral contributions that have dated most quickly in sacred works by Haydn, Handel and Bach, though in the case of *Messiah* and the B minor Mass there is a more fundamental mismatch of idiom at issue, notwithstanding more dedicated solo contributions from the likes of Anne Gjevang and Anne Sofie von Otter.

Time and again throughout the box it's music with a story that brings the best out of Solti. Many musicians now would argue that all music tells a story, but he belonged to a generation of conductors that was less inclined to spell out narratives behind the abstract cloak of Classical and Romantic-era symphonies. In a conversation with William Mann originally issued to accompany Beethoven's Ninth, he explained that he sought a middle way between Toscanini and Furtwängler; there is a square-jawed,



Sir Georg Solti taking a bow with the Chicago Symphony in Orchestra Hall during his 22-year reign (1969-91)

heavy-set muscularity to the 1972 cycle that the digital-era remake trims back to often exhilarating effect in the odd-numbered symphonies, especially an *Eroica* seized by the force of will that could sweep aside any doubts in concert, as it did on the sole occasion I saw him live, in an electrifying Chicago Ninth at the 1996 Proms.

By the same token, there is all too little Berlioz. Solti programmed excerpts from *Roméo* but never recorded them (look up on YouTube the party at the Capulets, charged with drunken fire and swagger). *La Damnation de Faust* in Boston and Chicago encapsulates the differences between Ozawa and Solti. Trained by John Oliver, the New England Conservatory Chorus make far more plausible and genuinely amusing drunken students in Part 2 than the Puritan lot in Chicago, but it's Solti who invokes Nature in its full breadth and immensity in the many orchestral interludes, and draws an authentically Faustian urgency from a shrewdly cast trio (Frederica von Stade, Kenneth Riegel, José Van Dam).

Later recordings in the set are often live, sometimes done 'on location' (a *Symphonie fantastique* remake in Salzburg, a Bruckner Eighth in St Petersburg), making rough, impulsive and unpredictable magic rather in the manner of Karajan's last decade on record. Stravinsky symphonies are clumsy and brass-heavy, but there's a deliciously wayward, tripping *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* placed last on a 1990-91 Debussy collection where the Chicago musicians play with the kind of intuited quickness of response that comes only with decades of (mostly) happy familiarity.

From this period, too, dates a latterday accommodation with the symphonies of

Shostakovich – which brings us full circle to Boston, and the cycle in the making with the BSO's present Music Director, Andris Nelsons, which is updated with a previously unissued Sixth. Solti snaps the tendons of the Eighth and Tenth taut – Herseth still on blistering form, after more than 40 years – where Nelsons is much looser-limbed, coming dangerously close to stasis in long expository initial movements. The older man presents a Shostakovich that the composer himself is far more likely to have recognised, I think, but then a sense of living history is palpable in both boxes, considerably enhanced by lavish documentary illustration of their musicians at work. **Peter Quantrill**



## THE RECORDINGS

### Boston Symphony Orchestra: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon

Boston SO with various artists

DG (57 discs) 479 7718

### Solti Chicago: The Complete Recordings

Chicago SO / Solti

Decca (108 discs) 483 1375

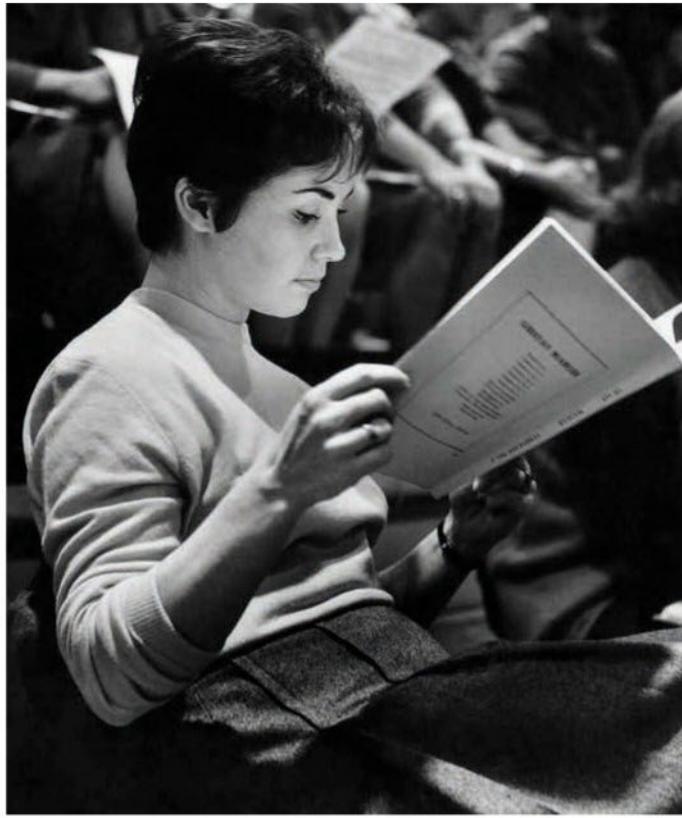
# Celebrating the art of Edith Mathis

**O**n record, the Swiss soprano Edith Mathis, who turned 80 on February 11, often feels like one of those singers who's easy to take for granted: the voice so reliably radiant and clear, the musicianship so reliably impeccable, that it's barely worth remarking upon. A typical mention in these pages suggests as much, referring – as if it goes without saying – to the 'always dependable and unfailingly musicianly Edith Mathis'.

Matters aren't necessarily helped by the fact that Mathis often appears as a foil to bigger musical personalities: as Susanna to Gundula Janowitz's Countess on Karl Böhm's *Le nozze di Figaro*, or Ännchen to her *Freischütz* Agathe under Carlos Kleiber; topping a quartet with Brigitte Fassbaender, Peter Schreier and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the Brahms *Liebeslieder-Walzer*; as Marzelline to Gwyneth Jones's Leonore in Böhm's Dresden *Fidelio*.

This 80th-birthday celebration box happily puts her squarely in the spotlight, though, giving a good overview of the 15 years or so in which she was recording for the label, from the late 1960s through to the early '80s. She continued singing for some time after, while her first mentions in these pages were for EMI/Columbia discs recorded in her early and mid twenties ('the voice is sweet, firm and characterful', said Edward Greenfield in May 1964 of her Anne Page opposite Fritz Wunderlich on a highlights disc of Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*).

Offering just seven CDs, however, DG's set has firmly opted for the highlights route. The alternative – producing a box reissuing all the recordings she appeared on – would admittedly have been unwieldy and impractical for collectors, but the solution still feels unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, a first disc bringing together Mathis's contributions to Karl Richter's Munich Bach recordings (plus three tracks from Charles Mackerras's recording of the Mozart-arranged *Messiah*) is useful, and certainly underlines the quality of Mathis's singing in the repertoire – a beautifully rounded tone, despite the strangely glassy quality of the recorded sound. The next disc is more bitty: a couple of bleeding



Mathis with the score of Mahler's Symphony No 4 which she recorded with Karajan

chunks of Mahler follow extracts from Haydn's *Die Jahreszeiten* and *Die Schöpfung*, Mozart's Requiem, Dvořák's *Stabat mater* and Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* – an exquisite 'Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit' under Daniel Barenboim.

## Words sit clearly on a steady vocal line without ever disturbing it

A third disc offers a good overview of Mathis's operatic Mozart: extracts from the famous Böhm recordings, a lovely 'Ruhe sanft' from the complete Philips *Zaide* under Bernhard Klee, as well as a very early live 'Là ci darem' (auf Deutsch) with Hermann Prey from 1960, when Mathis was only just into her twenties. An aria from Leopold Hager's Salzburg *Lucio Silla* shows that Mathis's coloratura wasn't to be messed with. Disc four gives us extracts from more operas: that Böhm *Fidelio*, that Kleiber *Freischütz*, and 20 minutes of Böhm's live 1969 Salzburg *Rosenkavalier*. She's also thoroughly convincing in three numbers from *La Damnation de Faust* (in Seiji Ozawa's Boston recording), and outstanding in the premiere recording of Henze's *Der junge Lord*, from which

we get Luise's lyrical 'Diese Benommenheit.'

The final disc in the set offers the famous Brahms *Liebeslieder-Walzer* recording, plus a smattering of the composer's folk song arrangements and other ensembles. But it's the two remaining discs that are the most attractive, showing Mathis the Lieder singer in all her quiet glory. Here DG gives us all her Schumann recordings with Christoph Eschenbach from the early '80s, plus a handful of Mozart songs and a dozen numbers from Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch*, both from the '70s.

The Schumann is unfailingly eloquent and persuasive: words sit clearly on a steady vocal line without ever disturbing it, and the voice is always cleanly produced, tone colour carefully and tellingly adjusted. It's a classic approach to the repertoire, and one that, though undemonstrative, simply lets the music speak for itself. The

selection from *Myrthen* and the *Wilhelm Meister* songs is very fine, too, and her *Frauenliebe und -leben* offers unalloyed pleasure, but Mathis and Eschenbach are also outstanding in the Op 70 *Liederalbum für die Jugend* and an interesting selection of later songs (they are especially good, it strikes me, in six of the Kulman songs Op 104).

We get similar virtues in the Mozart, and the Wolf *Italienisches Liederbuch* is wonderful, even if Karl Engel's piano playing is a touch dutiful. But it's a serious shame that we just get a taster of this 1977 recording, never before released on CD: a missed opportunity to restore the whole thing, including Peter Schreier's contributions, to the catalogue (although maybe DG has other plans in that regard up its sleeve). The booklet features plenty of delightful archive photographs, as well as a touching and informative appreciation of the modest and clearly impeccably professional Mathis herself, drawing on interview material.

**Hugo Shirley**

## THE RECORDING

**The Art of Edith Mathis** Edith Mathis sop  
with various artists  
DG ⑤ 479 8337

# Opera



Mark Pullinger reflects on the final recording by Dmitry Hvorostovsky:

*'All the artistry and intelligence is still there, though you're conscious of his effortful snatching for breath'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



Mike Ashman is thrilled by Nina Stemme's pulsating live Wagner:

*'There is a beautiful control of line and length of phrase, together with a beyond fearless playing of the tessitura'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**

## Bellini

### Norma

Maria José Siri sop	Norma
Sonia Ganassi mez	Adalgisa
Rubens Pelizzari ten	Pollione
Nicola Ulivieri bass-bar	Oroveso
Rosanna Lo Greco sop	Clotilde
Manuel Pierattelli ten	Flavio
Coro Lirico Marchigiano 'Vincenzo Bellini'; Fondazione Orchestra Regionale delle Marche / Michele Gamba	

Stage directors Luigi Di Gangi and Ugo Giacomazzi

Video director Tiziano Mancini

Dynamic (F) **DVD** 37768; (F) **BLU** 57768

(144' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Arena Sferisterio,

Macerata, Italy, July-August 2016

Includes synopsis



Hot on the heels of Opus Arte's release of the Royal Opera's new *Norma*, given a guarded welcome by Neil Fisher in January,

here's an altogether more modest version from the Macerata Opera Festival. Instead of Àlex Ollé's grandly executed updated staging for Covent Garden, the wide open-air space of the Arena Sferisterio is inevitably home here to something considerably less complex.

Federica Parolini's designs nonetheless make clever use of strands of frayed rope to suggest various locales. Rope and scraps of material, indeed, play an important role throughout; you might be forgiven at one point for mistaking Norma and Adalgisa for a couple of Wagner's Norns. Daniela Cernigliaro's costumes offer a mixture of grungy druid and (for Pollione) something like dystopian freedom fighter, replete with natty face paint.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the cast has one singer in common with the Royal Opera's: Sonia Ganassi as Adalgisa. But she seems no more ideal for the role here, despite standing out in such less exalted surroundings. In the title-role, María José

Siri shows herself to be the possessor of a big old-fashioned Italianate soprano. It's a sturdier, more assertive instrument than Sonya Yoncheva's essentially lyric voice in London, but she's all over the place when it comes to the work's coloratura demands. She is also let down by Michele Gamba's pedestrian conducting, which, along with often rudimentary *Personenregie* (there's a fair amount of arm-waving), prevents the drama from ever catching fire.

Of the men, it's Nicola Ulivieri's sturdy Oroveso who makes the strongest impression. Rubens Pelizzari's Pollione is reliable enough, and has impressive diction and projection, but can't offer enough thrills to make up a lack of refinement. In fact, however much one wishes to admire the honesty of this achievement – and many will prefer, no doubt, its straightforwardness of approach to the muddled concept of the Royal Opera's staging – refinement and Bellinian style is in very short supply. The orchestral playing is distinctly scrappy and thin (the banda that interrupts at the end of 'Casta diva' is almost comically raucous), the choral singing weak.

And unfortunately the dramatic temperature remains generally too low to make up for such failings, or to make this recommendable ahead of Opus Arte's more glamorous offering. As before, Dynamic also offers us a CD release (CDS7768), which, also as before, is a non-starter in the more competitive audio-only field. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Pappano (1/18) (OPAR) **DVD** OA1247D;

**BLU** OABD7225D

## Bizet

### Djamilah

Jennifer Feinstein sop	Djamilah
Eric Barry ten	Haroun
George Mosley bar	Splendiano
Piotr Kamiński spkr	Merchant
Poznań Chamber Choir; Poznań Philharmonic Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz	

Dux (F) DUX1412 (68' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonic Concert Hall, Warsaw, April 4-6, 2017

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The general consensus is that Bizet's first mature work is a decent

piece of music but not such a great opera, due largely to Louis Gallet's static, character-deficient libretto after Alfred de Musset's of-its-time story *Namouna*. On this evidence, that sounds about right. But opinion might have moved on with respect to Bizet's importing of Oriental elements into his three-hander telling of a caliph falling for one of his monthly mistresses. Hanslick and others believed the composer had done so tastefully. Yes, there are examples of that – as in the melisma-strewn aria that oscillates on the Aeolian scale as the title character spins Haroun a love-fuelled yarn to soften him up – but there are a good few that sound awkwardly close to caricature (mostly when the chorus is involved).

When Bizet isn't feeling the need to almost literally spice it up, the exoticism of his score is undoubtedly one of its key strengths. That is evoked through unusual phrase shapes, evocative instrumentation (including an offstage chorus evoking a sunset over the Nile), a distinct form of sensuality that modulates with sliding ease and some heated harbingers of *Carmen*.

As it is, *Djamilah*'s tale doesn't work; she sings a Lament and is forced to disguise herself as the next slave girl in order to persuade Haroun of her love. That does the trick, and the work ends in an enraptured 15-minute duet. That's where this live recording from the ever-curios Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival in Warsaw comes good, as Łukasz Borowicz paces his orchestra and singers carefully but surely towards the finish line.

Elsewhere, plusses and minuses. Jennifer Feinstein doesn't have the plangent voice that the part of Djamilah most obviously suggests and she is heavy in some of the melismatic passages. But there is a delicious darkness to her voice, sure consistency



Dramatic conviction: Franco Fagioli and Il Pomo d'Oro with richly upholstered Handel

across its range and a rare control of vibrato whether she is passionately railing or looking tenderly inwards. She is the vocal highlight next to the slightly less charismatic but well-sung Haroun of Eric Barry and Splendiano of George Mosley (the latter struggles to tune in the ensemble pieces). All three project as in a live concert performance – which this is – and the chorus does so even more. Not the subtlest performance of an opera that could be said to live by subtlety; but, with the only real alternative being Lucia Popp's well-known but in some respects dated recording from 1983, this will do fine for now. **Andrew Mellor**

*Selected comparison:*

Gardelli (4/89) (ORFE) C174 881A

## Handel



**Ariodante** - Dopo notte atra e funeste; Scherza, infida, in grembo al drudo. **Giulio Cesare in Egitto** - Se in fiorito, ameno prato. **Imeneo** - Se potessero i sospir miei. **Oreste** - Agitato da fiera tempeste. **Partenope** - Ch'io parta? **Il pastor fido** - Sento brillar nel sen. **Rinaldo** - Cara sposa, amante cara; Venti, turbini, prestate. **Rodelinda** - Pompe vane di morte ... Dove sei, amato bene?. **Serse** - Crude furie degl'orridi abissi; Frondi tenere e belle ... Ombra mai fu

Franco Fagioli counterten

Il Pomo d'Oro / Zefira Valova vn

DG © 479 7541GH (80' • DDD)  
Includes texts and translations



Back in 2004 a rising young countertenor released his first solo recording of arias by Handel and Mozart (Arte Nova, A/04). The performances, though technically promising, were a little bloodless emotionally – no match for their many rivals. With his latest disc, Franco Fagioli returns to Handel for the first time as a recitalist since that early effort, and this time the results are arrestingly, uncompromisingly thrilling.

There has always been a brute brilliance to Fagioli's performances. His extraordinary agility, coupled with his power and range, makes for quite a technical armoury, but it's one that has rendered him oddly invulnerable, unable to find (or perhaps simply uninterested in finding) the fragility and humanity – the emotional space – this music demands if it is ever to be more than just a vehicle for virtuosity.

So while the coloratura thrills here are predictably spectacular, it's the other

elements – the new-found care and weight of the slower arias, the range of vocal brushstrokes throughout, the dramatic conviction – that hold the attention. The thick-spread tone through 'Frondi tenere' (the recit preceding 'Ombra mai fu'), the sudden feathery, breathy lightness of Mirtillo's 'Sento brillar nel sen' from *Il pastor fido* and a 'Cara sposa' in which Fagioli's plush voice decays into frayed threads of emotion – all speak of an artist absolutely in control of not just his instrument but also its theatre.

Spectacle-seekers need not fear, though: Fagioli plays unashamedly to his strengths in a glossy selection of showpieces, including not only 'Crude furie' and *Oreste*'s exhilarating 'Agitato da fiera tempeste' but also a second stab at 'Venti turbini'. All (a bizarrely measured 'Dopo notte' aside) are exemplary, animated by the invention and bravado of Fagioli's ornaments, the impossible clarity and articulation of the coloratura and the singer's sheer pleasure in his own peak fitness.

All wire and wood, Il Pomo d'Oro (directed from the violin by Zefira Valova) are a natural foil to Fagioli's richly upholstered voice. Playing the straight man, they temper his instinctive



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Mozart's early Lucia Silla from Milan: Krešimir Špicer as a sympathetic Silla and Giulia Semenzato a coquettish Celia – see review on page 88

indulgence with dry, quick musical repartee. It's a seriously classy double-act, a partnership that elevates an outstanding disc to one of the finest Handel recitals in a while. **Alexandra Coglian**

## Handel

### Lotario

**Marie Lys** sop ..... Adelaide

**Sophie Rennert** mez ..... Lotario

**Jorge Navarro Colorado** ten ..... Berengario

**Ursula Hesse von den Steinen** mez ..... Matilde

**Jud Perry** counterten ..... Idelberto

**Todd Boyce** bar ..... Clodomiro

**Göttingen Festival Orchestra /**

**Laurence Cummings**

Accent M ③ ACC26408 (3h 7' • DDD)

Recorded live, May 19, 2017

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The libretto of *Lotario* (1729) was adapted from Orlandini's *Adelaide*, which Handel had probably heard recently in Venice while recruiting new singers. Having poisoned the king of Italy, usurpers Berengario and Matilde scheme to force the widowed queen Adelaide to marry their

son Idelberto (a decent fellow who is nothing like his evil parents); Lotario (the king of Germany) defeats and captures Berengario and rescues his beloved Adelaide – aided by the intervention of the honourable Idelberto. Alan Curtis's version was hampered by regrettable abridgements, and at around the same time a concert performance conducted by Paul Goodwin was whittled down to a single disc of arbitrary highlights (Oehms, 12/04). NDR's live broadcast from last year's Göttingen Handel Festival is not complete either – there are numerous cuts, mostly (but not only) to recitatives, and several essential developments in the plot are obscured. Nevertheless, this warts-and-all performance has a persuasive dramatic heart – due in large part to Laurence Cummings's expert direction of the excellent orchestra, which uses a satisfying variety of expressive rhetorical tools and aptly shaded textures.

The beleaguered Adelaide is sung by Marie Lys with disciplined agility and élan; her resolute defiance of her captors in 'Scherza in mar la navicella' starts from a position of regal dignity and grows to angry vehemence in its final flourishes, whereas her private admission of hopelessness and desperation ('Menti

eterne') drips with poignancy and pathos. Sophie Rennert's firmly focused legato singing is well suited to Lotario's elegant description of an optimistic pilgrim unconcerned by nightfall (the intricately contrapuntal 'Non disperi peregrino'). Jorge Navarro Colorado gets around rapid triplet *fioriture* superbly in Berengario's bitter reaction to his defeat ('Regno e grandezza'), and his awakening penitence is admirably euphonious ('Vi sento, sì'). Ursula Hesse von den Steinen's Matilde is a cruel harridan; her vengeful retort to her son in the stinging 'Arma lo sguardo' was later Handel's model for Jephtha's 'Open thy marble jaws' (another complicated parent-child situation). Jud Perry overcomplicates the simplicity of Idelberto's lovely 'Bella, non mi negar' but acts assertively as the drama's selfless moral hero. Todd Boyce's blustering Clodomiro is more one-dimensional than Handel's music suggests, but the strings' juxtaposition of storms and calm is realised perfectly in 'Se il promette calma'.

Notwithstanding a few imperfections, this is a convincing argument that *Lotario* is not merely packed with excellent music but can be gripping theatre. **David Vickers**

*Comparative version:*

Curtis (12/04) (DHM) 82876 58797-2

**Mozart****Lucio Silla**

**Krešimir Špicer** ten.....Lucio Silla  
**Lenneke Ruiten** sop.....Giunia  
**Marianne Crebassa** mez.....Cecilio  
**Inga Kalna** sop.....Lucio Cinna  
**Giulia Semenzato** sop.....Celia  
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan / Marc Minkowski**  
*Stage director Marshall Pynkoski*  
*Video director Arnalda Canali*  
**C Major Entertainment** (F) (2) **DVD** 743308;  
(F) **Blu-ray** 743404 (3h 6' • NTSC • DTS-HD MA5.1,  
DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)  
Recorded live, March 2015



Although this production of the teenage Mozart's *Lucio Silla* was first seen at the Salzburg Festival in 2013, it was filmed when it transferred two years later to Milan, where the work was premiered on Boxing Day 1772. That premiere at the Teatro Regio Ducal was hampered by recalcitrant singers and delayed by two hours by the Archduke, distracted by his correspondence – thank-you letters for Christmas presents, perhaps.

Despite a handful of appearances on disc, the work has since languished somewhat in that difficult early-Mozart no-man's-land, the brilliance of much of the music held back by the stiff dramatic aesthetic of high *opera seria*. Marshall Pynkoski's production is admirable for the way that it deals with this issue.

Here's a director who makes no apology for the work. While others might be tempted to overload the stage with distractions to keep the audience engaged during its string of *da capo* arias, Pynkoski draws you in to engage with them, directing each singer with an impressive, engaging eye for detail. He creates his own aesthetic of artful, flowing theatricality, which is underlined effectively by Antoine Fontaine's designs. The stage offers austere Baroque grandeur with fluid shifting of set and backdrops; the costumes, not a toga in sight, are swashbuckling rococo.

There are occasional snippets of dumb show acted out behind, but these are very much the exception, and are often barely noticeable in camera direction that concentrates on the singers. Dancers crop up during the choral numbers, and offer some delicate waving-about of swords at the end of Act 2, but are generally employed sparingly. All told, it's a relatively straightforward show – certainly more so than Jürgen Flimm's

Venice staging on DG (3/07) – but an eminently effective one.

It benefits from a fine cast, too. Krešimir Špicer sings mellifluously, even if his tone is short on sweetness and focus, and does all he can to make Silla himself sympathetic – a tall order with this dictator who, in time-honoured fashion, finds enlightenment just in time. Marianne Crebassa makes a fantastic Cecilio, handsome and beautifully sung, and Lenneke Ruiten offers a noble, determined performance as Giunia – Cecilio's betrothed and Silla's crush. Inga Kalna is formidable in the other trouser role of Cinna, and Giulia Semenzato charming as a coquettish Celia; the attempt to introduce a bit of humour into their interactions, however, falls flat.

Mark Minkowski conducts the La Scala orchestra with plenty of verve, if not quite the drive you get from Adám Fischer on his Dacapo set (A/08). Eagle-eyed readers might notice the lack of a second tenor: the smaller role of Aufidio indeed gets the chop in a performance that otherwise offers most of Mozart's notes.

The interval, incidentally, is placed half way through Act 2, after Giunia's show-stopping 'Ah se il crudel periglio', but the track-listings on the pop-up Blu-ray menu and in C major's poor booklet confusingly – and erroneously – describe the whole first half as 'Act 1'. Never mind: for an effective video version of this opera, this can be recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

**Scartazzini****Edward II**

**Michael Nagy** bar.....Edward II  
**Agneta Eichenholz** sop.....Isabella  
**Ladislav Elgr** ten.....Piers de Gaveston  
**Andrew Harris** bass.....Roger Mortimer  
**Burkhard Ulrich** ten.....Walter Langton  
**James Kryshak** ten.....Lightborn  
**Jarrett Ott** bar.....Angel  
**Markus Brück** bar **Gideon Poppe** ten.....Soldiers  
**Mattis van Hasselt** treb.....Prince Edward  
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper, Berlin / Thomas Søndergård**  
*Oehms* (F) (2) **OC969** (85' • DDD)  
Recorded live, March 1 & 4, 2017  
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The most successful British operas of the last few years would suggest that a sizeable strand of the opera audience appreciates new works in which the orchestral score once more gives the impression of controlling the drama.

That is one area in which Andrea Lorenzo Scartazzini's *Edward II* appears rather more haphazard than, let's say, Adès's *The Exterminating Angel* or Benjamin's *Written on Skin*. Much but not all of his score is reactive, with dramatic flashpoints left to voices alone, sometimes spoken.

Not that Scartazzini is afraid to put his audience through the mill in his Swiss-written, German-staged telling of an English story premiered in 2017. Over the course of *Edward II*'s Hamlet-like downward trajectory, electronic elements in the score wrap the audience in fear and violence. The orchestra is no shrinking violet either, shrieking loudly like Andriessen one moment and appearing eerily wind-blown à la Lachenmann the next. Violence breeds violence in this piece, but there is salvation at the last in what sounds like a dramatic masterstroke: after we've witnessed the 90-minute descent of this 14th-century monarch persecuted for his sexuality, a group of modern-day tourists (presumably of varied sexual orientations) is ushered into the room in which he was murdered and the cool facts of the matter are recounted by a tour guide.

The aloof, muttering tourists have the same chilling emotional detachment as the children in the dying moments of *Wozzeck* but that is the dramatic coup, wrenching the story out of time and place. That's how it seemed to me, anyway, but in truth it's hard to tell given there is no translation to accompany the German libretto and we're relying on a one-dimensional audio capturing of a three-dimensional piece. Nor can this one moment – in which a lack of dramatic musical churn actually works very well in a theatrical sense – atone entirely for the absence of the same elsewhere.

Other than that, this to-the-point score gets a tight performance under Thomas Søndergård and there is some mightily effective singing. Michael Nagy delivers Edward's notes with consistent fortitude, underlining Scartazzini's belief that he was more a brutalised animal than a victim but not conveying a great deal of change (though, without that translation, it's hard for me to trace to what extent that exists in the libretto). More obvious is that Agneta Eichenholz captures Isabella's change of heart – after fantasising about a sex change that might allow her husband to love her, she joins his persecutors – and she has just as much vocal presence. The other parts are taken well but strangely; Isabella is the only female role while the composer casts his supplementary, redemptive angel as a male transvestite. **Andrew Mellor**



A refined Rosenkavalier: Elina Garanča and Renée Fleming's historic farewell to their roles in the Met's 2017 production

## R Strauss

### Der Rosenkavalier

**Renée Fleming** sop ..... Die Feldmarschallin

**Elina Garanča** mez ..... Octavian

**Günther Groissböck** bass ..... Baron Ochs

**Erin Morley** sop ..... Sophie

**Markus Brück** bar ..... Faninal

**Susan Neves** sop ..... Marianne

**Alan Oke** ten ..... Valzacchi

**Helene Schneiderman** mez ..... Annina

**James Courtney** bass ..... Notary

**Matthew Polenzani** ten ..... Italian Tenor

**Scott Conner** bass ..... Police Commissioner

**Tony Stevenson** ten ..... Innkeeper

**The Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra /**

**Sebastian Weigle**

**Stage director Robert Carsen**

**Video director Gary Halvorson**

Decca 074 3944DH2;

074 3945DH (3h 23' + 24' • NTSC • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonuses: Backstage at the Met: interviews with cast and crew; 'Animals in Opera' feature

Recorded live at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, May 13, 2017



Robert Carsen – in both this present staging and his previous essay (also on DVD: ArtHaus, 9/10) – is among a



number of directors who have bumped Hofmannsthal's 18th-century Maria Theresa setting forward to the 1910s, contemporary with the opera's creation. The music makes this feel like a natural move and the staging is liberated from much expensive and hard-to-replicate baroque frippery.

Carsen (and his designers Paul Steinberg and Brigitte Reiffenstuel) moreover run with the full implications of this immediately pre-war period. They put Ochs's motley Lerchenau retinue in soldiers' clothing – and stage their bizarre Act 2 choral interjections as an amusing flat-on-the-floor army field exercise (choreographer Philippe Giraudieu). And they make Faninal an arms manufacturer (field guns displayed at his home) and, most controversially, present the final moments of the opera as page boy (here, youth) Mohammed's drunken vision of troops firing and dying in the First World War. The latter effect (not too clearly filmed) of course denies a final ambivalent link between the Marschallin and Octavian, but Fleming's character here has already latched on to the Police Commissioner.

This new release is sad for being the adieu to their roles of both Fleming and Garanča, two of the most played-in interpreters in recent years. The occasion serves them well. Fleming has always been

good at the modern psychological side of the Marschallin, clearly focused on the role's dilemma of ageing; Garanča presents her character's age, masculinity and boy/girl comedy with at least as much aplomb and sheer energy as any Octavian since Brigitte Fassbaender or Janet Baker. Both are in secure voice, Fleming digging passionately and fearlessly into character in the Act 1 'clocks' monologue and the crisis of surrendering her lover in the final trio. They are helped by the unusual fireball of Günther Groissböck's Ochs, younger (but not too much) than usual, free of clichés of age and movement, gross in quite an original manner and (revealingly) even threatening in Act 3 with his suggestion of blackmailing the Marschallin about her relationship with Octavian. Erin Morley sings beautifully as Sophie, especially the key top notes in the Rose duet and trio; it's a slight shame that, with the ages of the other two ladies looking so spot-on, this Sophie, as coiffed and made up, looks older than she should.

Weigle's conducting leans to the classical and restrained – the Karl Böhm and Richard Strauss approach to the piece. Side by side with more luscious approaches from modern-instrument forces, the hectic five-minute start to Act 2 (heard nowhere better than on a Walhall transfer of a 1946 Met broadcast under Fritz Busch) sounds a

little underpowered and the 'Rofrano' chorus too present. But Weigle and his players don't let us down in the trio and the final pages.

The DVD sounds and looks good, although the shot selection/editing is not always so great – the actual arrival of the Rose, brilliantly acted by Garanča, is not as punchy as it might be. Above all, though, because the production puts Hofmannsthal's complicated, seemingly too wordy but brilliant libretto in extreme focus and the performances are so refined, this DVD, a historic event, can be recommended in a crowded market.

Mike Ashman

## Tchaikovsky



### The Queen of Spades

Misha Didyk	<i>ten</i>	Herman
Svetlana Aksanova	<i>sop</i>	Lisa
Larissa Diadkova	<i>mez</i>	Countess
Alexey Markov	<i>bar</i>	Count Tomsky
Vladimir Stoyanov	<i>bar</i>	Prince Yeletsky
Anna Goryachova	<i>mez</i>	Polina
Andrei Popov	<i>ten</i>	Chekalinsky
Andrii Goniukov	<i>bass</i>	Surin
Mikhail Makarov	<i>ten</i>	Chaplitsky
Anatoli Sivko	<i>bass</i>	Narumov
New Amsterdam Children's Choir; Chorus of Dutch National Opera; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Mariss Jansons		
Stage director Stefan Herheim		
Video director Misjel Vermeiren		
C Major Entertainment	② DVD 743908; ③ BD 744004 (3h 1' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)	
Recorded live, June 9 – July 3, 2016		
Includes synopsis		



Tchaikovsky identified closely with Herman, the anti-hero of his opera *The Queen of Spades* (*Pique Dame*), whose gambling addiction leads to the deaths of his mistress, Lisa, and the old Countess, whom he threatens into revealing the secret of 'the three cards'. The opera culminates in the deranged gambler's own suicide. 'Wept terribly when Herman gave up the ghost', the composer wrote in his diary. In his revelatory production for Dutch National Opera, heading to Covent Garden next season, Stefan Herheim takes the theme of Tchaikovsky the outsider as his main focus. Alienated from society on account of his homosexuality, Tchaikovsky's mysterious death – contracting cholera from drinking iced water, possibly with

the intention of taking his own life – is also referenced in a staging that places the composer squarely centre stage.

I adored this staging when I saw it in Amsterdam and love it no less on revisiting it via Blu-ray. Superimposing the composer's biography on to arguably his greatest opera works ingeniously. Tchaikovsky himself becomes the central character, here played by Vladimir Stoyanov, who sings the role of Prince Yeletsky, Lisa's intended. Like Tchaikovsky's own marriage to the infatuated Antonina Milyukova, it's a match we know is doomed from the first scene, where we see the composer recovering from a sexual encounter for which he's paid a cackling Herman a fistful of roubles. With the arrival of the Empress, Tchaikovsky/Yeletsky is publicly humiliated, kissing the hand of Catherine the Great only for it to turn out to be Herman in drag.

Tchaikovsky's adoration of Mozart also features, the *Daphnis and Chloë* pastiche featuring characters costumed as a feathered Papageno and Papagena, a giant music-box birdcage a metaphor for the composer's entrapment. Herheim has Tchaikovsky everywhere – the male chorus are clones, Polina wears an identical grey flannel suit as a youthful composer and even Herman seems a straggly-haired, middle-aged version. Lisa is drowned by the chorus dousing her with their glasses of iced water before reappearing to Herman at the end, a black-winged guardian angel. Tchaikovsky, let's remember, himself attempted suicide by wading into an icy Moscow river.

Musically, standards are extremely high, led by Mariss Jansons's inspired presence in the pit. The Royal Concertgebouw play Tchaikovsky to the manner born, impassioned strings and glowing brass to the fore. Misha Didyk's baritonal Herman sounds stronger on disc than he did in the house and he acts the unhinged gambler convincingly. Svetlana Aksanova sings a steely Lisa, a touch hard-edged but fully committed to the drama. Alexey Markov is luxury casting as Tomsky, dispatching a terrific Ballad of the Three Cards, while Larissa Diadkova is remarkable as the Countess – singing rather than growling her role. Stoyanov's performance as Yeletsky/Tchaikovsky is an acting tour de force. Required to be on stage most of the evening, he acts the role of tortured composer wonderfully, singing Yeletsky's gorgeous 'Ya vas lyublyu' with smooth legato. The only (tiny) drawback with the filmed performance is that, up close, it's all

too easy to spot when Stoyanov is briefly substituted out for actor/pianist Christiaan Kuyvenhoven to provide onstage accompaniment for Polina's song. Otherwise, this is a terrific memento of a provocative but enthralling production.

Mark Pullinger

## Verdi



### Ernani

Ramón Vargas	<i>ten</i>	Ernani
Svetla Vassilieva	<i>sop</i>	Elvira
Ludovic Tézier	<i>bar</i>	Don Carlo
Alexander Vinogradov	<i>bass</i>	Don Ruy Gomez da Silva

Karine Ohanyan *mez* Giovanna

Maurizio Pace *ten* Don Riccardo

Gabriele Ribiš *bar* Jago

Monte-Carlo Opera Chorus and Philharmonic

Orchestra / Daniele Callegari

Stage director Jean-Louis Grinda

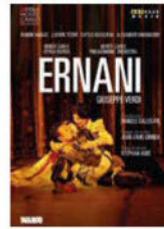
Video director Stéphan Aubé

Arthaus Musik ④ DVD 109 344; ⑤ BD 109 345

(130' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 &

PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live 2014



It's difficult to understand why Verdi's *Ernani* struggles to get performances. It hasn't played at the Wiener Staatsoper since 2002 or at La Scala since 1983 and, mystifyingly, has never set an operatic foot on the Covent Garden stage. Until Jean-Louis Grinda's production in 2014, *Ernani* hadn't been performed at the Opéra Monte-Carlo since 1917 ... and if I was feeling uncharitable I might suggest audiences won't have spotted much difference. Cutting edge it is not.

The opera – Verdi's fifth – is based on Victor Hugo's play and tells the tale of a bandit in love with Elvira who, as fate would have it, is destined to be married to the elderly Don Ruy Gomez da Silva. Ernani plans to abduct her but is foiled by the king, Don Carlo, who – wouldn't you know it – is also vying for Elvira's hand. Conspirators, oaths of allegiance and an honour suicide are typical operatic ingredients thrown into the mix, along with a terrific score bursting with melody. *Ernani* is very much the blueprint for *Il trovatore*, while Carlo – who is elected Holy Roman Emperor Charles V during Act 3 – reappears two decades later in a monk's habit in Verdi's Schiller-inspired *Don Carlos*.

Watching it again on this Blu-ray confirms that *Ernani* fully deserves a place in the repertory, even if Grinda's staging is



A revelatory Queen of Spades: the Dutch National Opera's production of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece references aspects of the composer's life

conservative to the point of static. A giant angled mirror above the stage adds a few interesting perspectives, while the costumes are lavishly in period, but the direction is old-school park-and-bark. The dagger with which Elvira threatens the king looks about as dangerous as a butter knife and when Silva calls in Ernani's pledge to do away with himself on hearing his horn call, it's literally curtains for our bandit hero as a pair of star-spangled drapes draw slowly together.

The casting, in truth, is mixed. In his prime, Ramón Vargas had a beautiful, lyric tenor, but he's past his best now, showing strain on high notes which are often flat. Svetla Vassilieva's raw tone and hollow lower register sound like she's sung too many Odabellas. Alexander Vinogradov's Silva dons a woolly beard straight out of a hoary production of *Nabucco*, but his singing is far from woolly, a lovely, soft-grained bass, lacking some heft, but he makes a noble sound. But it's the baritone who gets all the best tunes in *Ernani* and Ludovic Tézier's Don Carlo is a class act; his bronze tone and aristocratic phrasing are breathtaking. Daniele Callegari leads a solid account, even if there are times when a little more impetus from the pit would have been welcome. **Mark Pullinger**

## Verdi

### Otello

**Nikolai Schukoff** ten.....Otello

**Lester Lynch** bar.....Iago

**Melody Moore** sop.....Desdemona

**JunHo You** ten.....Cassio

**Carlos Cardoso** ten.....Roderigo

**Kevin Short** bass-bar.....Lodovico

**Luis Rodrigues** bar.....Montano

**Leandro César** bass-bar.....Herald

**Helena Zubanovich** mez.....Emilia

**Gulbenkian Chorus and Orchestra /**

**Lawrence Foster**

Pentatone (P) ② PTC5186 562 (143' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Nikolai Schukoff is Austrian, Melody Moore and Lester Lynch are from the United States. Their names might be unfamiliar but greatness is surely around the corner, for among modern interpretations of *Otello* these must rank among the best. Melody Moore is a warm, womanly Desdemona. She floats a lovely 'Amen risponda' – *dolcissime*, as Verdi asks – in the love duet. She manages not to wheedle over-much when pleading for Cassio, before protesting her innocence with dignity; come the passage about

weeping – 'Guarda le prime lagrime' – she pours out her sorrow in one glorious, passionate phrase. There's no shrieking at 'Ah! Emilia, addio!', just a sense of loneliness and despair. Lester Lynch can't quite hit the top As in Iago's drinking song but he delivers a very respectable trill earlier on, when recounting his jealousy of Cassio. His powerful 'Credo' is not enhanced by the maniacal laughter that follows. If his relating of Cassio's dream is prosaic, elsewhere his scheming is all too plausible.

Nikolai Schukoff is rather too free with the rhythm at Otello's entrance, after which his performance is exemplary. The baritonal quality of his voice is ideally suited to the role and he shapes the music sensitively: the beautifully phrased 'la gloria, il paradiso' in the love duet finds an echo in 'spento è il sol, quell sorriso ...' in the great monologue in Act 3. Schukoff rightly delivers the start of that monologue, 'Dio! mi potevi scagliar' as a whisper; and, unlike most other interpreters on record, he accentuates the opening phrase correctly. His whole performance is an impressive portrayal of a noble warrior brought low. The other parts are well taken, including a resonant Lodovico from Kevin Short.

The Gulbenkian Orchestra and Chorus are splendid, though the latter is rather

backwardly recorded. Lawrence Foster is good on detail, such as the chromatic trumpet phrase at Shakespeare's 'imminent deadly breach', and the strings' hairpin dynamics in the lively, tense passage as Iago observes Cassio's fateful approach to Desdemona. The only blot on an outstanding performance is the speeding-up in the orchestral postlude to the duet for Otello and Iago at the end of Act 2. It's not serious, of course, but the effect is so much better when the tempo – steady, as it is here – of 'Si, pel ciel' is maintained. Otherwise, this is a notable achievement.

**Richard Lawrence**

## Verdi

### Rigoletto

Dmitri Hvorostovsky *bar.*.....Rigoletto  
Nadine Sierra *sop.*.....Gilda  
Francesco Demuro *ten.*.....Duke  
Andrea Mastroni *bass*.....Sparafucile  
Oksana Volkova *contr.*.....Maddalena  
**Men of the Kaunas State Choir; Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra / Constantine Orbelian**  
Delos M ② DE3522 (127' • DDD)  
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



This new *Rigoletto* from Delos tragically serves as a valedictory recording. The death of Dmitri Hvorostovsky last November has robbed the operatic world of one of its greatest voices. His triumph in the 1989 Cardiff Singer of the World (in a 'Battle of the Baritones' final with Bryn Terfel) was gripping – nobody who heard it will forget his seamless legato in Posa's death scene from *Don Carlo*. Hvorostovsky's first recording, a selection of Verdi and Tchaikovsky arias, was incredibly beautiful, a disc I still spin often. The Siberian baritone, with his silver mane and aristocratic demeanour, was the definitive Onegin of his era, the last role he sang in London in December 2015.

Vocally, the young Hvorostovsky reminded me much of Ettore Bastianini; he cited the Italian baritone as one of his great idols. Bastianini was another singer whose life was cut tragically short due to cancer. In the 1960s Bastianini only disclosed his health battles with his closest family and friends – Franco Corelli was one of his few colleagues who knew – sometimes suffering a hostile reception for some rough later performances. He was booed as Scarpia at the Met in 1965 (his final year on stage). The world is a smaller place now and, thanks to social media, we all knew of

Hvorostovsky's ongoing treatment for a brain tumour, desperately willing, praying for a recovery. The ovation for his 'Cortigiani' at a Met gala last May was a tremendous outpouring of love from his adoring public.

Sadly, but inevitably, Hvorostovsky's voice in this recording (made in July 2016) is a shadow of his younger self. Gruff and effortful, it lacks the smoothness and juiciness of former years. All the artistry and intelligence is still there – there is real bitterness to his 'Pari siamo' monologue – though you're conscious of his effortful snatching for breath. The opening of Rigoletto's great aria 'Cortigiani, vil razza dannata' is full of explosive bluster, but the closing section 'Miei signori ... perdonate, pietate' lacks the legato silkiness of old. The jester was also one of Bastianini's great roles, captured on disc in his prime under Gianandrea Gavazzeni with the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, even if it is hampered by a curiously murky recording.

Delos has gathered a decent supporting cast for Hvorostovsky. Nadine Sierra, as Gilda, has a bright, forward sound – not unlike Renata Scotto on that Gavazzeni account – but it's rather aggressive and relentless. Her 'Caro nome' is interminably slow, with lots of self-admiring pretty notes held for far too long, and there's little dramatic involvement. Francesco Demuro is a breezy Duke of Mantua, a slight sob to his sound, but never forcing his tenor too hard. Andrea Mastroni is an inky Sparafucile and Oksana Volkova a fruity Maddalena.

Constantine Orbelian – a frequent Hvorostovsky collaborator on Delos – saps the performance of adrenalin in a pedestrian account of Verdi's rip-snorting score, no match for that old master Gavazzeni. Hvorostovsky's legions of fans will certainly want to hear this; but he will principally be remembered on disc for his other, earlier recordings: his Posa (Haitink), his Onegin (Bychkov) and a superb collection of Russian romances. **Mark Pullinger**

*Selected comparison:*  
Gavazzeni, r1960 (10/61<sup>st</sup>) (URAN) URN22 406

## Vivaldi

### Dorilla in Tempe

Romina Bassi *basso*.....Dorilla  
Serena Malfi *mez.*.....Elmiro  
Marina de Liso *mez.*.....Nomio  
Lucia Cirillo *mez.*.....Filindo  
Sonia Prina *contr.*.....Eudamia  
Christian Senn *bar.*.....Admeto  
**Radiotelevisione Svizzera Chorus; I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis**  
Naïve Vivaldi Edition F ② OP30560 (132' • DDD)  
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The heroic-pastoral melodrama *Dorilla in Tempe* (Venice, 1726) was revived by Vivaldi in 1728 (Venice) and 1732 (Prague), but the only version for which a musical source survives is a pasticcio rearrangement put on at Venice's Teatro Sant'Angelo in 1734 – so about half the arias are not by Vivaldi. Diego Fasolis and I Barocchisti deliver a ripe and zesty performance that is immeasurably superior on all fronts to the patchy recording by the Ensemble Baroque de Nice directed by Gilbert Bezzina (Pierre Verany, 2/95). In this new account there is dramatic tautness to recitatives that recount the tribulations that hinder the blissful union of Dorilla (a princess of Thessaly) and Elmiro (a shepherd), whose rival Nomio turns out to be the disguised Apollo; the god slays the dragon Python that is plaguing Thebes, but eventually resigns his claim on Dorilla, sorts out the misunderstandings between the bickering lovers Eudamia and Filindo, and presides over a double marriage ceremony.

The opening chorus 'Dell'aura al sussurrar' heralding the arrival of spring is a parody of the beginning of *The Four Seasons* (published shortly before the original 1726 production); it is played and sung charismatically, although I am surprised that the additional interleaving solo passages are taken by entire sections of the Coro della Radiotelevisione Svizzera. Several brief hunting choruses are dispatched with verve at the end of Act 2, although gutsy velocity is at the expense of bucolic charm. King Admeto's astonished response to Nomio's promise to slay Python ('Dall'orrido soggiorno') is sung boldly by Christian Senn and horns introduced halfway through pack a surprising punch. Dorilla's horrified reaction to being sacrificed to appease Python (in a manner like Andromeda chained to the seashore) is acted powerfully by Romina Bassi, although Fasolis's interventionist continuo instrumentation with bubbling organ and other tricks is unnecessarily distracting.

Elmiro's energetic Neapolitan-style arias by Hasse and Leo are sung vivaciously by Serena Malfi. Filindo's explosive *aria di bravura* 'Rete, lacci, e strali adopra' (by Giacomelli) showcases Lucia Cirillo's declamatory brilliance, whereas Marina de Liso's stylish singing is complemented by softly tender strings and intimate plucked continuo realisations in Nomio's 'Bel



Lawrence Foster directs his Gulbenkian forces in an outstanding account of Verdi's *Otello*

piacer saria d'un core' (also by Giacomelli). Sonia Prina is in extrovert voice as Eudamia; the densely whirling strings in 'Al mio amore il tuo risponda' is unmistakably authentic Vivaldi, as are the thrilling shifts of unbridled tension in Nomio's 'Fidi amanti al vostro amore'.

It is possible to imagine a less abrasive and more charmingly shaded account of this rarely revived curiosity but the long-awaited resumption of Naïve's Vivaldi Edition is cause for celebration. **David Vickers**

## Wagner

**Der fliegende Holländer** - Johohoe! Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an. Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten? **Siegfried** - Dort seh' ich Grane, mein selig Ross; Ewig war ich, ewig bin ich; Heil dir, Sonne! Heil dir, Licht! O Siegfried, Siegfried! Seliger Held! **Tristan und Isolde** - Erfuhrest du meine Schmach; Mild und leise wie er lächelt.

**Die Walküre** - Raste nun hier, gönne dir Ruh!

**Nina Stemme** sop

**Chorus and Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera**

Orfeo (F) C937 171B (76' • DDD)

Recorded live, 2003-13



The Swedish soprano Nina Stemme is, of course, pre-eminent

among contemporary Wagnerian singers. But the market choices of today mean that collecting official recordings of her major roles necessitates quite a hike through different labels and even formats – two-thirds of her Brünnhilde, for example, is still only available on DVD. It was never thus with her predecessor Birgit Nilsson.

That fact, however, makes Orfeo's new assembly of live bleeding chunks from a decade of the singer's repertoire at the Vienna State Opera all the more valuable a reminder of the class and range of this artist. We begin in 2003 with two scenes from the *Holländer*, the voice excitingly forward, the pitching exact and the tricky *agilità* that Wagner demands in the climactic run-out of Senta's first actual meeting with the Dutchman (Falk Struckmann) expertly negotiated. Also expertly negotiated is Seiji Ozawa's handling of the score which, stylistically, rightly eschews the big modern-instrument bashing of Karajan (and, truth to tell, a little Thielemann) in favour of Weber-influenced point and lightness.

The two excerpts from the then new Vienna *Ring* of the late 2000s find Stemme in similar pulsating form, although it's a pity that the orchestra under Franz Welser-Möst cannot sound as fresh in

the entire final scene of *Siegfried* as their newly awoken Brünnhilde. There is a beautiful control of line and length of phrase in the Swede's singing here, together with a beyond fearless placing of the tessitura – a special performance, well noticed and chosen by Orfeo. It's good too to have a further part of her Sieglinde (Act 1 of this performance is already available). Because of her Glyndebourne appearances and the Abbey Road studio recording (under Pappano – EMI/Warner, 9/05), Stemme's Isolde seems more familiar to us here. An exciting reading of the Act 1 Narration and Curse and a well-vocalised end of Act 3 (strictly the Verklärung but the world still calls it the Liebestod) are a little held back by Welser-Möst's intentionally but frustratingly restrained accompaniment.

This is indeed a record of outstanding vocalism but I don't think that Orfeo's note needs to promote that so excessively on what is after all (to the purchaser) the hidden interior of the disc. For the record, the transfers from broadcasts are good and natural; there are no texts or translations.

**Mike Ashman**

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

# Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

## Kris Davis and Craig Taborn

Octopus

Pyroclastic Ⓜ PRO3



Piano duos have been around for a while but recent iterations have served as a reminder of the richness of the format.

Davis and Taborn exploit the full orchestral possibilities of the two instruments all the while keeping firmly but flexibly within the time-honoured tradition of percussive playing. The expected roles of lower and upper register are often inverted so that the right-hand figures provide rhythms that often ripple and slur into tremolo while the left creates curt, sharp melodies that are sometimes akin to the bass in a doo-wop ensemble. However, it is when the players interlock a series of intensely drum-like stuttered phrases on Davis' 'Ossining' that

both the carefully weighted attack and listening skills of each hit a peak. The two players overlap rather than collide, and as an example of both polyrhythmic nous and ultra-precise attention to detail the piece is thrilling, as if Davis and Taborn are in post-Reichian fashion, phasing in and out like changing breathing patterns in the same body. This is a fine calling card.

**Kevin Le Gendre**

## John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble

All Can Work

New Amsterdam Ⓜ NWAM094



Two Grammy-nominated releases is not bad going for a contemporary 20-piece jazz ensemble whose leader John Hollenbeck is a boldly unconventional composer-drummer. This new album

should bring them similar accolades. It's a tribute to Laurie Frink, the band's ex-trumpeter whose emails to Hollenbeck, previous to her untimely death, are evocatively cast in collage-like form, and recited by the ingenious vocalist Theo Bleckmann. Next to Hollenbeck's quirky instrumental commentary on the 10-minute title-track, the vocalist finds a kind of poetry of the everyday. Musically it echoes in part the looped acoustic textures of Hollenbeck's smaller group The Claudia Quintet, and is based on one of Frink's influential teaching studies. Hollenbeck also leads other dedications. To John Taylor and Kenny Wheeler, he offers a colourful, high-spirited take on the trumpeter's 'Heyoke', and a playfully imaginative tread through Kraftwerk's 'The Model'. 'Lud' contrasts electronica-inspired jabbing vibes and brass punctuations with sustained choral-like harmonies. **Selwyn Harris**

# World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

## Nils Økland Band

Lysning

Hubro Music Ⓜ LC49093



Nils Økland has a characteristic so often found in Norwegian music, a combination of humility and determination. He has had a career that has earned him the highest respect in folk, jazz, classical and experimental music for his impeccable Hardanger fiddle playing, his sense of musicianship, his passion for traditions and for breaking boundaries.

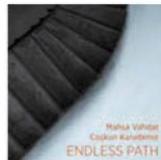
Lysning brings together other musicians who speak and think as Økland does: Rolf-Erik Nystrøm, whose saxophone playing and approach to composition is mischievously disruptive; Sigmund Apeland, whose work with Økland has opened up the harmonium world to other spheres; Håkon

Mørch Stene's percussion explores dynamics and textures in a supremely sensitive way; and bassist Mats Eilertsen's playing surely has a hotline to heaven. There is not one note on this album out of place, not one moment when we're not confronted by a beautiful isolation that somehow makes sense of this world, and which lingers long in the memory. **Fiona Talkington**

## Mahsa Vahdat and Coşkun Karademir

Endless Path

Kirkelig Kulturverksted Ⓜ FXCD 443



A while ago, the Secret Ensemble from Istanbul invited Iranian singer Mahsa Vahdat to make a recording, the critically acclaimed *Call of the Birds*. Now the group's vocalist and baglama player Coşkun

Karademir has teamed up with Vahdat for a follow-up, adapting texts by the Sufi scholar-poet Rumi in Persian and by the Turkish mystic poet Yunus Emre in Turkish. This album juxtaposes Turkish and Iranian traditions, but also defines common denominators in which these neighbouring cultures overlap; the music demonstrates how Turkish and Persian mystic traditions fertilised each other, with Rumi, for instance, spending the final years of his life in Konya, Turkey. The voices and instruments are given free rein to interact with each other, mirroring the commonness in culture. All this is helped by the unique acoustics of the recording location in Oslo, Norway: the early 20th-century artist Emanuel Vigeland's mausoleum, where the echoes last more than 14 seconds and the natural reverb is used as a musical instrument.

**Neil Van Der Linden**

*Gramophone, Jazzwise and Songlines are published by MA Music, Leisure & Travel, home to the world's best specialist music magazines. To find out more, visit [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk), [jazzwisemagazine.com](http://jazzwisemagazine.com) and [songlines.co.uk](http://songlines.co.uk)*

# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## Classical stylists

Piano fans will be in their element, and Orfeo's series of Salzburg recitals feature a musical match made in heaven

One of my abiding 'surprise' moments when radio presenting was broadcasting a recording of the *Allegretto* finale of Schubert's Piano Sonata No 2 in C, D279/346, as played on a period piano by Austrian pianist and scholar **Paul Badura-Skoda**, where *fortissimo* chords sound a percussive tattoo. No one in the studio expected the piano to make quite that sort of racket, and to boot, it lasted way beyond the stated timing of 3'15" – 7'35", in fact. But it's fascinating to listen to: peasantry in sound, you might say. The (complete) set of the sonatas from which that recording was taken dates from the 1990s (Arcana A364), whereas the RCA collection discussed here (and expertly covered by Jed Distler in his *Gramophone Focus*, 12/17) dates from 1967-68 and includes the pianist's own completions of Schubert's unfinished works; plus there are bonus 1971 re-recordings of D845, D850, D664, D959 and D960. Interesting to compare, say, the two performances of D157 across the RCA and Arcana recordings, the earlier version imbued with Schubertian melancholy, the remake (on a Donath Schöfftos fortepiano, c1810) more like a late Baroque/early Classical siciliano (both utterly convincing).

Interesting, too, to experience the three recordings of Schubert's final sonata, D960 in B flat. The opening on the version in the main series is replete with subtly split chords, which were tightened by the time Badura-Skoda redid the piece in 1971, then again in the 1990s. All three performances maintain a sense of serenity at the start of the *Andante sostenuto*. In the booklet, Badura-Skoda himself writes at length about the music, his words both informed and impassioned, his essay an appetiser for performances that are chock-full of interesting incident and original ideas, at times impulsive or extrovert, at other times warmly considered and introspective. Try his sensitive handling of the passage at around 5'18" in the first movement of D840, or the excitement generated by his

completion of the *Allegretto* fragment. It's exceptional playing. Indeed, this should provide much musical nourishment for any open-minded lover of Schubert's sonatas, especially as the sound is generally excellent.

My one complaint about this highly recommendable set concerns presentation. Recording information is sometimes difficult to suss (I'm still not sure which recording is which when it comes to D960), and the reproduced vinyl sleeves are out of sync with the CD sequence ('The Complete Piano Sonatas Volume 1', as on LP, contains the late sonatas and therefore appears towards the end of the CD set). I'm all for original sleeve reproductions but not if they cause confusion. My advice to listeners is not to take the LP jackets as your principal guide – use the booklet instead. It's a pity that the CD sleeves weren't renumbered for the sake of the set (in other words, as vols 1-12).

Badura-Skoda is one of a select coterie of pianists who seem absolutely at home in the recording studio. Another is **Andor Foldes**, whose Deutsche Grammophon legacy is currently enjoying something of a revival (thanks to Australian Eloquence). His reissued Bartók series has already returned him to the critical map and I'd rate the best of his Beethoven on a similar plane. A coupling of the First and Fifth Piano Concertos with Ferdinand Leitner on the rostrum is distinctive in many respects, the *Emperor* (with the Berlin orchestra) primarily for its unostentatious virtuosity and the prayerful way Leitner sets up the *Adagio un poco mosso*, the First Concerto (Bamberg SO) for its high-energy finale and excellent playing of the first movement's cadenza (Beethoven's first cadenza, that is). The Bamberg recording is the better of the two, technically speaking.

Two double packs featuring selected solo sonatas along with shorter works display Foldes's craftsman-like approach, with each note securely tapped into place and the odd quiet arpeggio brushed with the gentlest of

touches. There are interesting points of interpretation too, such as the *Waldstein*'s first movement, where after a brisk, crisply dispatched opening Foldes slows the tempo for the second idea. The first movement of Sonata No 4 in E flat isn't quite the prescribed *Allegro molto e con brio* (try for comparison the more coltish Maria Grinberg: Melodiya MELCD100 2025 – 4/13); and while Opp 101, 109 and 110 are rich in manicured detail (always a strength with Foldes), they rarely plumb the depths in the way that they do in the hands of, say, Pollini and Brendel. Foldes is more about neatness, subtle asides and immaculate surfaces. His playing is a pleasure to listen to on its own terms, rather like enjoying the precise workings of a meticulously engineered watch movement – quite unlike Schnabel or Kempff (specifically his wartime recordings newly reissued on APR), who are more prone to scuff the music's surface in pursuit of its soul. It's just a pity that Foldes plays so few of the written repeats. Superb transfers, though the actual sound is quite variable.

### THE RECORDINGS



**Schubert** Complete  
Piano Sonatas  
**Badura-Skoda**  
RCA Red Seal ⑧ ⑫  
88985 39549-2



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos  
Nos 1 & 5  
**Foldes; Bamberg SO; Berlin PO / Leitner**  
DG Eloquence ⑧ 482 7048



**Beethoven** Piano Sonatas Nos 4, 6, 9, 19, 24, 25, 31, & shorter works  
**Foldes**  
DG Eloquence ⑧ ② 482 7053



**Beethoven** Piano Sonatas  
Nos 8, 15, 17, 21, 23, 26, 28, 30  
**Foldes**  
DG Eloquence ⑧ ② 482 5854



Paul Badura-Skoda: Schubert sonatas that sound like no other

## Barenboim in his twenties

One moment in particular held me captive on the recording of **Daniel Barenboim's** 1970 Salzburg Festival Beethoven sonata recital: it occurs 9'14" into the second movement of Op 111, just after the 'boogie-style' syncopated passage which then quietens to a humble murmuring, the sort of rapt transition that Barenboim's beloved Furtwängler would surely have approved of. Also, there's the breadth of the arietta theme itself, so effectively sustained, whereas the close of the work sails into the distance on a sea of trills. The interpretative variety on offer is remarkable, from the leaping impetuosity of Op 10 No 3's opening *Presto* to the trance-like intensity of its *Largo e mesto*, Beethoven sounding many years beyond his relative youth – a deeply mournful though ultimately noble utterance. That prematurity is equally true of Barenboim himself, who makes big music out of the *Waldstein's* opening *Allegro con brio*, darkens considerably for the finale's *Adagio* introduction, then for the finale, again taken very broadly, employs a vast range of tonal colours – though the slow tempo means that the *Prestissimo* coda (brilliantly played) rushes off like a frightened fox fleeing from the undergrowth. Audience members who recalled the great masters of yore must have sensed the presence of a young throwback. I'm not in the least surprised to learn (from the booklet notes) that Igor Markevitch thought that Barenboim played like a conductor. Such is his orchestral range of dynamics and timbres, especially in Op 111 – the undoubtedly highlight of this well-recorded and musically valuable recital.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAIN BENAINOUS/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

## THE RECORDING



**Beethoven** Piano Sonatas Nos 7, 21 & 32  
**Barenboim**  
Orfeo Ⓜ C 939 171B

## Regal Michelangeli

A quite different manner of Beethoven sonata interpretation arrives in another Salzburg recital: incomplete reportage of a programme given by **Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli** in 1965 (he refused to broadcast the rest, making for a very short disc of 40'04"). We already have other recordings of his remarkable interpretation of Sonata No 3 in C. The first movement is exceedingly dramatic, with a signature slowing down for the mysterious coda (much more marked than on most other recorded performances) and a carefully tiered reading of the Scherzo. The finale is thrown off with great aplomb. But fine as the Beethoven is, it's the performance of the Bach-Busoni Chaconne – one of various 'live' versions we have from this pianist – that's the real draw, a reading quite unlike the relatively refined 1948 EMI/Warner one. In fact, it's much closer in mood and tone to the unforgettable March 1973 recital I actually attended (and that you can hear on YouTube, albeit in severely compromised sound). What both performances have in common, apart from technical prowess and conceptual grandeur, is head-spinning excitability and an extra degree of freedom with regard to phrasing. But Orfeo's (mono) sound is infinitely better, capturing this keyboard colossus at the very height of his powers.

## THE RECORDING



**Bach-Busoni** Chaconne  
**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 3  
**Michelangeli**  
Orfeo Ⓜ C 943 171B

## Brahms: in a mellow tone

If there's an ideal singer-song musical match it's **Grace Bumbry** and Brahms Lieder. Orfeo's release of a recital from the 1965 Salzburg Festival with **Beaumont Glass** (1925–2011) at the piano is a thing of great beauty, from the chilling alarm of 'Auf dem Kirchhofe', where the voice rings resplendent, to the rapt opening of 'Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht', in which the young nightingale sings above the drowning darkness – a narrative that is conveyed by the duo with a rare sense of intimacy. Then there's the meltingly beautiful 'Dein blaues Auge', so intensely expressed here. 'Feldesamkeit', a dream of a summer night, drifting through the realms of bliss, is one of Brahms's greatest Lieder and craves sustaining powers beyond the norm, which Bumbry possesses. A longtime favourite of mine is 'Von ewiger Liebe', famously recorded pre-war by the Russian bass Alexander Kipnis, but Bumbry's implied Kundry-like eroticism suits the song equally well, and the central climax – taken at a marginally quicker tempo than the rest – pushes the intensity level virtually to the point of self-combusting. 'Nicht mehr zu dir zu gehen', a plea for the beloved to express his or her real feelings, plumbs the sorts of depths frequently visited by Brahms in his chamber and later solo piano works and both Bumbry and Glass arrest our attention with a performance that focuses to perfection the music's aching reflectiveness. 'Sapphische Ode' is a song of love set among the sweet fragrances of night and needs careful pacing, not only at the outset but within the narrative itself, sensitively gauged rallentandos being crucial for the rise and fall of the musical line. 'Wir wandelten', although equally lyrical, lightens the mood, and so Bumbry responds with a brighter vocal texture. There are 20 Lieder in all, captured in good mono sound and an edifying way to spend an hour of your evening, especially by the fireside during the late winter months.

## THE RECORDING



**Brahms** Lieder  
**Bumbry** mez **Glass** pf  
Orfeo Ⓜ C 941 171B

# Books



Ivan Moody welcomes a detailed study of Russian music:

*'Das Rheingold' was performed in Leningrad in 1924 as part of a far-reaching effort to reclaim Wagner from the Nazis'*



Richard Whitehouse on the writings of the composer Peter Dickinson:

*'That Dickinson emerged ready to pursue his own line of stylistic pluralism says much for his early tenacity'*

## Russian Music since 1917

Reappraisal and Rediscovery

Edited by Patrick Zuk and Marina Frolova-Walker

OUP/British Academy, HB, 450pp, £85

ISBN 978-0-19-72-6615-1



While a quantity of significant writing on Soviet and Russian music has appeared in recent years (from among others Pauline Fairclough, Laurel E Fay, Gavin Dixon, Levon Hakobian and Ivana Medić, as well as the editors of this collection), this book – the result of a conference held back in 2011 – is a hugely important milestone in this field in that it tries to reset the clock, so to speak. In other words, this book acknowledges the problems of the West in understanding the situation of writers on music in the Soviet Union, and the difficulties of those same writers in gaining access not only to materials from the West but to the research of their colleagues. As the editors note in the Introduction (page 8): ‘The overwhelming emphasis in much Western writing on Soviet music on the effects of censorship and bureaucratic controls risks distorting and oversimplifying our impressions of a cultural scene that remained stubbornly complex and diverse, in spite of all the pressures to conform.’ Indeed.

The first chapter, by Marina Rakhmanova, explores precisely the ‘achievements and lacunae’ in recent Russian writing, something of enormous importance to any Westerner interested in this field, because so much of what she is aware of could only be known by someone in Russia. Patrick Zuk complements this with his own chapter discussing Soviet music outside Russia, and the chapters by Levon Hakobian and Marina Frolova-Walker bring the story into the present, examining the ways in which both Russians and non-Russians have had to struggle to

find new ways of looking at the repertoire, free from earlier preconceptions. These four chapters constitute the first part of the book, and should not be considered merely as an academic prelude; on the contrary, they illuminate the entire problem in fascinating ways. The chapters in the second part deal with exactly what state controls did to music in the Soviet Union and the complexities of composers’ and performing musicians’ reactions to them. Outside Russo-musicological circles (and more specifically those who have read Pauline Fairclough’s work), it is surely not widely known that *Das Rheingold* was performed in Leningrad in 1924, for example, as part of a far-reaching effort to reclaim Wagner from the Nazis, itself fascinating in the ways the Soviets found to deal with the whole phenomenon of Romanticism.

Part 3 is made up of two chapters, by Olga Manulkina and Daniil Zavlunov respectively, on the consequences of restrictions on musical freedoms, and the long shadow still cast on the figure of Glinka by Soviet musicology. This is followed, in Part 4, by two chapters casting light on ‘The Newest Shostakovich’; Olga Digonskaya’s chapter in particular brings to light intriguing questions about the composer’s attachment to communist ideology, a brave tack indeed considering the vitriol and proclamation of absolute certainties that have characterised so much writing about Shostakovich in the past.

The final two parts deal with ‘Russian Music Abroad’ and ‘1991 and After’. In the first, Richard Taruskin reflects, following Stravinsky’s friend Lourié, on the very idea of the existence of a ‘Russia Abroad’, concluding that there was certainly not such a ‘school’, while Elena Dubinets looks down the other end of the telescope, examining the work of Russian émigré composers in the very contemporary context of a shifting, globalised world in which migration is hardly a rarity. Finally, the three chapters of Part 6 deal with the consequences of the mutation or cessation of Soviet musical

institutions on Russian music after 1991. Laurel E Fay’s chapter, recounting pictorially what took place in April 1991 at the Eighth All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, is particularly remarkable, but William Quillen’s discussion of the significance of the idea of Russian pre-modernism (in the 1920s) on the part of contemporary composers is also extremely thought-provoking.

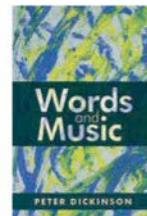
It should be made clear that this book, the consequence of a meeting of highly eminent musicologists, is extremely readable. Not only is the subject matter of the greatest interest, and the new perspectives presented on it frequently revelatory, but the editors and publishers have gone to great lengths to present a text that is, while lacking nothing in detail, very accessible to anyone with an interest in Russian music of the 20th century and beyond. **Ivan Moody**

## Words and Music

By Peter Dickinson

Boydell Press, HB, 336pp, £30

ISBN 978-1-7832-7106-1



Even those readers of this magazine who are unfamiliar with his music will have come across the words of Peter Dickinson, a distinguished contributor to these pages. This book reaffirms such insights over a wealth of subjects not exclusively musical. Stephen Banfield’s opening contention of Dickinson’s moving between careers as parallel to his music modulating between styles might only be sustained so far, but it does underline his sheer versatility; also, the adept avoidance of aesthetic demarcations which have characterised his activities over six decades.

An essay in autobiography provides an overview of Dickinson’s musical careers (all three of them) in typically deadpan terms, with additional focus on his

formative years in New York during 1958–61 (and those jarring changes in cultural perspective this must have entailed); a period, moreover, when the heady interplay of musical styles might all too easily have fazed one less rigorous in his assessment of those possibilities. That Dickinson emerged from the experience ready to pursue his own line of stylistic pluralism says much for his early tenacity.

Much the longest of the individual sections is ‘Writings about Music’, which duly sets out Dickinson’s preoccupation with topics such as the American experimental tradition or the singular legacies of Erik Satie and Lord Berners, while

taking in tributes to such once-controversial figures (too important to be forgotten) as the composer and author Wilfrid Mellers and the educationalist Bernarr Rainbow, together with a touching remembrance of David Munrow. Dickinson’s pithy and economic literary style is always at the service of the subject at hand. Not least the essay ‘Style Modulation as a Compositional Technique’, offering his trenchant perspective on a then dynamic postmodernism that needs to be studied (and its still relevant and timely observations acted upon) by present-day composers and cultural commentators.

Major literary figures are subsequently given their due, including Emily Dickinson as set by generations of composers, and the currently undervalued Ruth Pitter, whose poetry ought to have commended itself more to musical treatment. Highly potent are Dickinson’s meetings with WH Auden, an author whose increasing world-weariness seemed intent on distracting from a world view as inclusive as it was probing, and Philip Larkin, whose curmudgeonly social outlook similarly offset a sensitivity and depth of insight that found an unwavering adherent in Leonard Bernstein.

A fastidious and astute word-setter, Dickinson is well placed to identify just what attracts specific composers to certain authors (and vice versa), and those ways in which texts can be enhanced (as well as on occasion neutered) through their setting.

Dickinson’s own music is the focus of three articles, examined in terms of both chronology and genre. Much the most significant of these, ‘Nationalism is Not Enough’ offers a typically thoughtful view on the crossing of national idioms between cultures in ways that have made the past century rich in artistic possibility, and which process may now be waning. Some of these issues are touched on in the ensuing section which includes a diverting ‘conversation’ with Erik Satie, his responses drawn directly from his own writings, and a memoir by Meriel Dickinson on the frequently groundbreaking recitals that she and her brother devised over several decades. Also featured here is an 80th-birthday conversation with *Gramophone*’s James Jolly, in which Dickinson’s thoughts on the future of Western art music – its creation but also its reception – are delivered with inimitable forthrightness and courtesy. Two final articles, a résumé

of travels in Mexico and a more substantial account of collating interviews for what was a fascinating memorial broadcast about Samuel Barber, round off the sequence.

This book is stylishly presented and illustrated (with several appealing concert flyers) in the best traditions of Boydell. The appendices comprise a chronological list of works (not to be taken for granted nowadays) and full discography of recordings by Peter and Meriel. These, along with a representative selection of original works, have latterly been (re-)appearing on the Heritage label, and readers are encouraged to investigate them; not least that featuring Dickinson’s concertos (1/15) for organ, piano and violin – which, between them, constitute his most important large-scale achievement and exemplify that resourceful integration of high art and vernacular elements which will likely prove his most enduring legacy. Nor should his sizeable contributions to the piano, organ or choral repertoire be passed over.

That said, any wider appreciation of Peter Dickinson is incomplete without a knowledge of his writings such as this book rewardingly makes possible. Literary food for thought indeed! **Richard Whitehouse**



The Newest Shostakovich: intriguing questions are brought to light about the composer’s attachment to communist ideology

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# MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly takes us on two listening journeys inspired by this month's cover story

## Influenced by Debussy

I thought I'd start this month's two listening journeys with the same work, probably the most masterly evocation of the sea in music, Debussy's **La mer**. There are dozens of outstanding recordings to choose from, but I've opted for a recording made back in 1964 by DG – Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. It remains a magnificent example of Karajan's mastery of colour, timbre and pulse, and the playing is breathtaking. The Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu was bowled over by Debussy's music and you don't have to listen long to his **Green (November Steps II)** of 1967 to discern the powerful inspiration that forged this gloriously colourful work (think *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* transported to 1960s Japan). For the young Olivier Messiaen, an early encounter with Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* was like a 'thunderbolt' and though Messiaen's harmonic language hardly imitated Debussy's the two composers come closest in their respective piano **Préludes**. Though more abstract – but only just! – in title, Messiaen explores with a pianistic language of wonderful luminosity a host of spiritual preoccupations at the heart of his evidently firmly held faith. Try Roger Muraro's superb recordings. Born two years before Debussy's death, Henri Dutilleux continued a tradition that placed him as an obvious successor of Debussy, Ravel, Roussel and others though with a distinctly modern voice (and one which earned him considerable opprobrium from Pierre Boulez). His violin concerto **L'arbre des songes**, premiered in 1985 and now a modern repertoire work, though structurally quite different to anything Debussy might have embraced, certainly belongs sonically to a similar aesthetic. A pupil of Messiaen but also a great admirer of the music of Debussy, the English composer George Benjamin's music sounds closer to his teacher's, but a work like the 2016 *Gramophone* Contemporary Award winner, **Palimpsests** (2002) has a Debussyan control of texture and atmosphere that surely connects him to the tradition. And following Stephen Hough's suggestion (in this month's cover feature – page 15) of the jazz pianist and composer, Bill Evans, how about a piece like **Peace Piece** – once heard, the link is surely evident ... we're not a million miles away from the *Préludes*.

**Debussy** *La mer* BPO / Karajan DG

**Takemitsu** *Green (November Steps II)* Toronto SO / Ozawa RCA

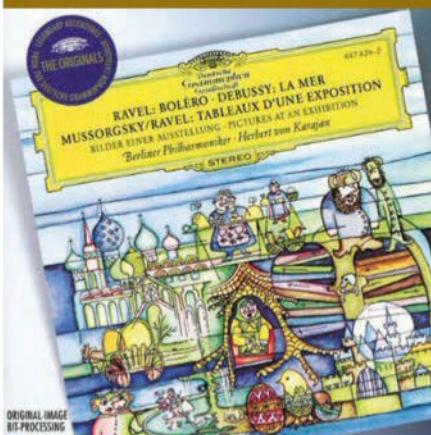
**Messiaen** *Préludes* Muraro Accord

**Dutilleux** *L'arbre des songes* Hadelich; Seattle SO / Morlot Seattle SO

**Benjamin** *Palimpsests* Ensemble Modern Nimbus

**Evans** *Peace Piece* Evans Concord

**Debussy's La mer**, one of the undisputed masterpieces of French music, starts two parallel journeys – through the composers Debussy influenced, and British composers portraying the sea



A Karajan classic from 1964

## On the waves

Same starting point – Debussy's **La mer** – but a different journey, and one that is undertaken on the water. Though it is impossible to imagine a greater evocation of the power and implacability of the sea than captured by Debussy, numerous other composers have been drawn to the subject, and particularly British composers; perhaps our position as an island nation has proved a major inspiration. One of Elgar's loveliest songs, 'Sea Slumber-Song' (the first of the **Sea Pictures**), pre-dates the Debussy by six years but it too captures the swell of the sea and its surging power to great effect. Written five years after the Debussy (and in the same place, Eastbourne and of a similar length), Frank Bridge's **The Sea** is a four-movement suite that offers a series of snapshots under different conditions

(by moonlight, in a storm and so on). It's a magnificent creation and has received some very fine recordings. As Debussy was writing *La mer*, Frederick Delius was at work on **Sea Drift**, a setting of Walt Whitman for baritone, chorus and orchestra that operates on a number of different planes simultaneously: a boy observes a pair of sea birds nesting until one day the she-bird flies off leaving her mate pining alone. But it awakens a new emotional experience in the boy, a powerful part of his maturing life. Also written at the same time as *La mer*, and also setting words by Whitman, is Ralph Vaughan Williams's **A Sea Symphony**, his first symphony and one of the most assured symphonic debuts in all music. The second movement, 'On the beach at night alone', is a study in atmosphere with a potent sense of space. Benjamin Britten's **Four Sea Interludes** from his opera *Peter Grimes* is a modern classic and a concert-hall staple – it needs little advocacy from me as it's a masterpiece and there are numerous superb recordings. A more seldom heard symphony to end: Sir Granville Bantock's **A Hebridean Symphony**, premiered in 1916. The opening section (it's couched in a single span) fuses a glance at ancient myth with a haunting portrayal of a seascape glimpsed through the mist until the sun bursts brightly on the scene: an impressive musical *coup de théâtre*.



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**Elgar** *Sea Pictures* Baker; LSO / Barbirolli

Warner Classics

**Bridge** *The Sea* Ulster Orch / Handley Chandos

**Delius** *Sea Drift* Terfel; Bournemouth SO / Hickox Chandos

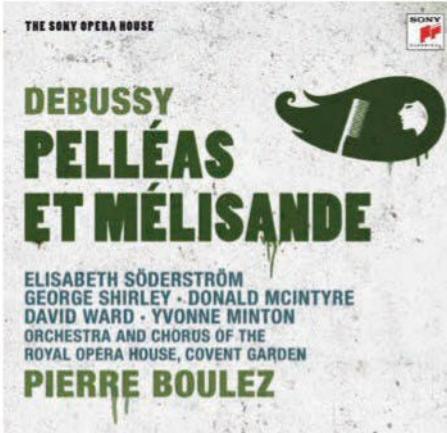
**Britten** *Four Sea Interludes* LSO / Previn

Warner Classics

**Vaughan Williams** *A Sea Symphony* Hallé / Elder Hallé

**Bantock** *Hebridean Symphony* Slovak State PO / Leaper Naxos

# Classics RECONSIDERED



## Debussy

Pelléas et Mélisande

Soloists: Royal Opera Chor & Orch / Pierre Boulez

Sony Classical

The long introductory essay by Boulez explains his whole approach to this marvellous score. His conception has struck some people as too lacking in mystery, and certainly there is none of that pallid mooning about more apt to *The Immortal Hour* than to Maeterlinck's drama, which as Boulez points out sets a common bourgeois situation in a vague, timeless context: no grandiloquent attitudes are struck, as he



**Hugo Shirley** and **Mike Ashman** discuss the 'classic' status of Boulez's studio recording of *Pelléas et Mélisande* with the Royal Opera, originally released by CBS in 1970



says, but there should also be no coyness. Most significant of all is a long analysis of the character of Golaud as it develops from initial uncertainty to manic obsession. It emerges from this recording with unusual vividness, thanks to a wonderfully nuanced performance by Donald McIntyre which all but steals the show. Elisabeth Söderstrom, beautifully in control throughout, makes an innocent but not bloodless Mélisande, and David Ward makes Arkel a simple old man; the minor roles are well filled, including that of Yniold, in which Anthony Britten's voice comes over more successfully than it

could do in the theatre. George Shirley, slightly wooden at first, warms into his part as it progresses and fully justifies the choice of a tenor for the role by his ringing tone at such important high-lying lines as 'Ils m'aiment plus que toi'. But the real beauty of the set is the positively luminous orchestral playing. Boulez has declared that 'to reduce the score to an accompanied recitative is conspicuously to betray it'; and under his inspired direction, flexible but shapely, the music glows and pulsates with everchanging colour and life. This is a most distinguished issue. **Lionel Salter (10/70)**

**Hugo Shirley** A couple of options were discussed before the decision was made to go with Boulez's *Pelléas et Mélisande* as the 'classic' version of the work to reconsider for this Debussy issue. It strikes me, however, that it's the kind of recording that shirks all those 'classic' trappings. It's deeply serious, aiming with almost monk-like devotion for what lies at the very heart of both Debussy and Maeterlinck. And it seems to me that it's a recording that has met with less fanfare than others over the years.

**Mike Ashman** Agreed – it's a classic Boulez 'clearing away the deadwood' operation. In an essay published with the recording's first release he wrote: 'In Debussy, the ideas of mystery, poetry and dream take on a profound significance only when they are achieved by precision, in full daylight; and in this he resembles Cézanne, who gave his landscapes their secret quality by means of light and plain factuality.' So, less fanfare because of this 'puritanism', maybe?

**HS** I'd say so. And I certainly get a sense of something like secrets whispered among initiates – of a beguiling, uncanny intimacy.

Compare that with, say, Karajan's glossier EMI account, which feels like a far more public statement of the piece: one imagines his recording was aimed as much at listeners new to the work as at those already familiar with it.

**MA** I know Karajan had tried it twice before but I can't help feeling that he himself was actually the listener new to the work! He spends so much time seeking – and, OK, sometimes achieving – fancy-coloured sonorities from the orchestra. From the beginning Boulez couldn't be more different. While Karajan and others spend their time evoking in music a 19th-century naturalistic forest, Boulez's conducting is linked to the more modern rhythm and dynamics – his gently rocking motion is the forest in which Golaud and Mélisande are lost.

**HS** Yes, we couldn't be further from clichéd Impressionism, and, to quote LS's review, 'there is none of that pallid mooning about more apt to *The Immortal Hour*'. I notice how, in particular, Boulez reacts only with utmost subtlety to the *expressif* markings

that are dotted around the score. But do you ever long for a little more, for him to let himself go? Is it ever *too* controlled or, to borrow your word, *too* 'puritanical'?

**MA** My short answer is 'no' because I love the tensile strength of what Boulez achieves; the form is so clearly conveyed that any romantic content can take care of itself, as in his Bartók. And there's no lack of dramatic excitement at the more 'operatic' moments such as *Pelléas* and Golaud emerging from the grotto (Act 3), Golaud's violence with Mélisande or his stalking and murder of *Pelléas*. Boulez's interpretation of repertoire has much in common with his literary and philosophical contemporaries such as Roland Barthes – reporting what's there rather than moulding it romantically into one's own image.

**HS** It's the sheer concentration and control he achieves that enables him to present the score almost objectively, in the first place, but also in a way that allows it to create its own, completely individual atmosphere every bit as beautifully as on any other recording. And I particularly like the way



Title-role Söderström and Shirley on the Royal Opera House stage in November 1969; 'classic' Boulez (inset)

that the Parsifalian echoes come across: vividly and compellingly, but also with the right sense of pallid melancholy.

**MA** Boulez's essay called those 'almost literal quotations'. His handling of the interludes where they mostly occur is less grand than Karajan though completely authentic.

**HS** Yes, and grandness isn't really, in my book, what *Pelléas* is about.

**MA** We've been talking of Boulez's 'monk-like devotion' and 'puritanism' in his handling of the score. But through hearing and enjoying the work of conductors such as Roger Désormière (conductor of a classic wartime *Pelléas*, an alternative candidate for this Classics Reconsidered) and André Cluytens, Boulez was thoroughly conversant with a more traditional romantic way of doing these pieces. I feel that here, as in his Wagner, he always had that in his ear while working.

**HS** Now you say that, it makes me feel as though we can indeed hear the distant echo of that sort of approach, even if on its own terms it's not a 'romantic' performance at all. But we've not talked yet about the fact that Boulez, in that same essay, seems

especially fascinated by Gólo, rather more so than with Pelléas and Mélisande themselves. That clearly affects his interpretation, not to mention the casting and the way the different singers are encouraged to 'act' – or not – on the recording.

**MA** Coming from theatre work with Jean-Louis Barrault and opera directors like Wieland Wagner, Boulez was, I guess, more intrigued by the psychology of Gólo – as he would be by Schön in *Lulu* – than by the romantic intrigues of the supposedly central couple. Certainly, he cast a 'big' player, Donald McIntyre – a strong all-round singer and actor whom he'd already worked with in Bayreuth as Klingsor and would again as Wotan, and a heavier voice than we're used to in the part nowadays.

**HS** Ah, yes, that's a very interesting bit of context about where Boulez would have been coming from, theatrically as well as intellectually – something that's too easy to forget.

**MA** But there's a lot more here than the bluster and the almost-madness you get from many Gólos. McIntyre's sense of loss and confusion in Act 5 – scenes that

can seem anticlimactic after the death of the 'hero' – is real and moving, as is Boulez's more dramatic than usual accompaniment of them. Do you think the other voices match up to this?

**HS** I'd say they definitely do. George Shirley's tenor Pelléas might start off a little objectively, but it is wonderfully sung, particularly when we get to the quiet ecstasy of the fourth act, where the higher reaches of the voice offer a cleanliness and confidence of tone that baritones struggle to get. And although one might expect Elisabeth Söderström to sound a little mature as Mélisande – or at least not 'girlish' enough by modern standards – I find that she, like her Pelléas, manages that remarkable feat of sounding both detached and fully involved.

**MA** I think that 'detached and fully involved' feeling has much to do with Boulez's habit of only recording once the stage show from which he was taking the cast was actually up and running, a kind of reverse of the Legge-Karajan method. He was able to take the best impetus from the production and still have had time to tighten it. Also notable here in terms of acting in that style are his then favourite mezzo Yvonne Minton's Geneviève and the refreshingly straightforward and un-guyed Arkel from David Ward, another Wotan.

**HS** Not to mention the terrific Yniold, Anthony Britten, a treble cast at a time (it seems) when using a treble was the exception rather than the rule. But I suppose it's time for a bit of summing up. I feel almost as though Boulez's approach is so single-minded and concentrated that comparisons are a little superfluous. But while this is an essential recording, it's also one that, perhaps more than usual, I'd always want to have complemented by others...

**MA** For me, they'd include Boulez's later 'remake', a DVD compiled from Peter Stein's Cardiff stage production with an attractive younger and lighter cast. And, as with his *Parsifal*, the conductor's return to the score is just that bit more romantic and warmer. I've also never forgotten Ansermet's neglected first recording: factual and not un-Boulez-like in its abjuring of grand operatic effects. But this first Boulez still sounds excitingly like a counterfactual projection of some time-travelled early score written by the conductor himself.

**HS** A 'classic', then, but one that is uninterested in its status as such, which speaks with an unusual quiet intelligence. **G**

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## *The verse anthem*

**Andrew Mellor** explores this very English form of sacred music – which essentially alternates solo-voice and full-choir passages accompanied by organ or viols – and discovers some striking and skilful works

**T**he verse anthem is a peculiarly English and unfailingly charming form whose most exotic fruits still remain a secret to many, even those well versed in the church music of the English Reformation. It developed from the Elizabethan ‘consort song’, in which a solo voice is accompanied by a consort of viols, usually in the recounting of a strophic text with repetitions employed for strategic emphasis. That gave birth to the ‘consort anthem’, with viols accompanying a number of voices, which prompted the alternation of solos with reinforcing choral passages both homophonic and polyphonic.

When the consort anthem gravitated away from the private chapel and towards the church in the Jacobean period, viols were replaced with an organ and the verse anthem as it is commonly known emerged: a work which intersperses solos for one or more voices with short choral passages that mostly reinforce material just heard. But the consort anthem continued in parallel as a subgenre; usually it was composers associated with the Chapel Royal or domestic institutions, where viols and their players were at hand, who continued to write solo-led but multi-voice anthems for viol accompaniment (works that these days pass muster as verse anthems as much as those written for organ accompaniment).

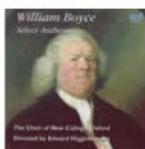
In the best examples of both, neither organ nor viol parts are mere reductions of the vocal lines or skeletal harmonic conveyors. They are often exquisitely crafted entities in their own right, bursting with deft counterpoint. In writing the vocal parts, composers benefited from an age when direct expression in the vernacular was favoured in the church, and the world of the theatre was blossoming outside it. The likes of Gibbons and Tomkins

approached the genre from a resolutely liturgical standpoint. Some might argue that the sacred straightjacket muted the expressions of theatrical composers such as

Blow and Purcell; others that it delivered works of supreme elegance and taste whose devotional soul has a particular dramatic flavour of its own. **G**

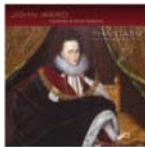


Anonymous oil painting of Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625), perhaps the finest exponent of the verse anthem



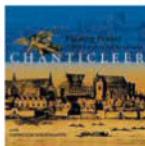
**Boyce**  
**O where shall wisdom be found?**  
 New Coll Ch, Oxford / Edward Higginbottom; Gary Cooper org  
 CRD (10/92)

The verse anthem lingered on far beyond what might be considered its heyday, perhaps as overworked composer-choirmasters relished its expressive potential but also saw that it threw the onus of preparation on to soloists. Boyce's were written in the Restoration style. With its echo effects and gentle expressivity, this one (1769 or earlier) is a good introduction to the form and is performed with commitment here.



**Ward**  
**This is a joyful, happy holy day**  
 Magdalene Coll Ch, Oxford / Daniel Hyde; Phantasm  
 Linn (12/14)

Verse anthems can tend towards the melancholy, joyous examples often misfire. Not so in the case of this contained celebration by John Ward, probably written for the investiture of Henry, Prince of Wales, in 1610. It employs viols as it was probably performed by Chapel Royal forces (the text itself refers to 'sweet harmony of instruments and voices'), but harks back to the consort song in other ways too. It gets a delicious performance here.



**Purcell**  
**My heart is inditing**  
 Chanticleer / Joseph Jennings; Capriccio Stravagante / Skip Sempé  
 Teldec (12/03)

A verse anthem? Debatable. This setting (mainly of verses from Psalm 45, written for the coronation of James II (1685), can sound a world away from the intimate works here by Humfrey, Tomkins and Gibbons. But it's known as a verse anthem and contains – perhaps even furthers – elements from all three composers, including design (though here the chorus comes first), French influence and use of melisma. This performance has real swing.



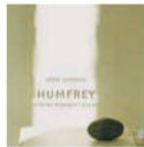
**Wise**  
**How are the mighty fallen**  
 Gonville & Caius Coll Ch, Cambridge / Geoffrey Webber; Thomas Hewitt Jones org  
 Delphian

Michael Wise was killed by the nightwatchman of Salisbury Cathedral after a foul-mouthed tirade. Unlike his unruly behaviour, Wise's music displays a clipped decorum that was a good fit for the form, as witness this example written around 1668, when Wise arrived at Salisbury as organist. It is a stern, engaging piece and its performance here is the highlight of a finely sung exploration of Wise's works.



**Gibbons**  
**This is the record of John**  
 Merton College Choir, Oxford / Benjamin Nicholas; Anna Steppeler org  
 Delphian (2/14)

Gibbons was the verse anthem's first champion and perhaps (given his ability to shade his harmonies with drama and write counterpoint with spiritual sincerity) its finest exponent. This, the most famous verse anthem of all, is atypical in its use of a single solo voice and narrative text. This recording treads an admirable line between declamation and devotion and underlines the wonder of the composer's keyboard writing.



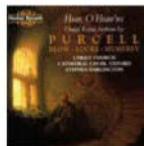
**Humfrey**  
**Hear, O heav'ns**  
 Sols; Clare Coll Ch, Cambridge; Romanesca / Nicholas McGegan  
 Harmonia Mundi (3/93)

Despite his death at 27 (in 1674), Pelham Humfrey exerted a significant influence over the generation of composers that followed him, including Purcell and Blow. To the verse anthem he brought expressive imagination and a florid French accent following studies in Paris. 'Hear, O heav'ns', more full-blooded than his better-known 'A Hymne to God the Father', demonstrates his declamatory style. But for Humfrey, the drama was in the detail, as this poised performance shows.



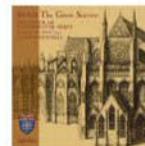
**Tomkins**  
**O Lord, let me know mine end**  
 Red Byrd; Rose Consort of Viols  
 Naxos

Thomas Tomkins was a master of melancholy, and for good reason: he witnessed his life's work, his home, his choir and his organ at Worcester Cathedral destroyed during the English Civil War. But we hear something bordering on neurosis in this exquisite, reconstructed setting (one part was lost) that straddles the consort song and the verse anthem. Red Byrd, singing one-part with historically informed vowel sounds, are unsurpassed in this repertoire.



**Blow**  
**O Lord, thou hast searched me out**  
 Oxford Christ Church Cathedral Choir / Stephen Darlington; Stephen Farr org  
 Nimbus (2/96)

John Blow's 'symphony anthems' (comparable to the Purcell) were preceded by smaller-scale bona fide verse anthems such as this mid-1670s setting of portions of Psalm 139. The melismatic word-painting in the solos is typically English; one of the two intertwining solo bass parts may have been conceived for the Chapel Royal's rich-voiced John Gostling, whose spirit is channelled here.



**Byrd**  
**Christ rising again from the dead**  
 Westminster Abbey Ch / James O'Donnell; Robert Quinney org  
 Hyperion (3/06)

Byrd's verse anthems, of which he wrote a mere handful, are not well known. They are, however, masterpieces. None more so than this pointed Easter celebration which uses obvious word-painting on top (particularly on the various settings of 'rising' and 'risen') but all manner of harmonic and rhythmic tricks below. The Westminster choir's experience with Byrd's polyphonic music pays dividends in the piece's wondrous counterpoint.

	<b>Early Music • Alte Musik</b>	[DDD] 8.550603
<b>Orlando GIBBONS</b>		
Consort and Keyboard Music Songs and Anthems		
Rose Consort of Viols with Red Byrd		

## Gibbons

**Glorious and powerful God** Red Byrd; Rose Consort of Viols  
 Naxos (2/95)

Orlando Gibbons could just as easily occupy the top spot for his highly affecting and heartfelt 'Behold, thou hast made my days' as for the more rousing protestation of faith 'Glorious and powerful God', in which bass and tenor soloists launch a twisting journey full of momentum that carries with it all the drama, majesty and

sincerity of its anonymous poetic text drawn from the New Testament. The piece was almost certainly written for a private chapel and so, as here, accompanied by viols. As in the example by Tomkins heard earlier, Red Byrd's revelling in every note and syllable is revelatory.

# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

No single stage production can handle all the facets of this fascinating opera buffa (or dramma giocoso), so imagination must come into play. **Richard Lawrence** selects the best recordings of the different versions

Mozart's letter of January 15, 1787, to his pupil and friend Gottfried von Jacquin is well known, but still worth quoting: 'Here they talk about nothing but *Figaro*. Nothing is played, sung or whistled but *Figaro*. No opera is drawing like *Figaro*. Nothing, nothing but *Figaro*'. *Le nozze di Figaro* had been premiered in Vienna on May 1, 1786, but it was the production in Prague later that year, mounted by Pasquale Bondini's Italian opera company, that was the greater success. Mozart and his wife travelled there in January 1787, and it was from Prague that the composer wrote to Jacquin. By the time he and Constanze left for Vienna on February 8 he had secured a commission to write a new opera for Bondini.

That opera was *Don Giovanni*, with Lorenzo da Ponte again providing the libretto. It was to be a busy year for both men; moreover, Mozart had to deal with the emotional shock of his father's death in May. The Mozarts returned to Prague in early October 1787 with some of the music still to be composed. Mozart knew all but one of the singers and, as usual, he tailored his music to their voices. He even celebrated – or teased – Teresa Saporiti, who sang Donna Anna, by having Giovanni sing the word *saporito* ('tasty') four times in rapid succession. After two postponements, the opera was given on October 29. It ran for many performances, and its success led the Emperor Joseph II to command a production in Vienna. This took place on May 7, 1788; and the changes that Mozart made caused a problem that is still with us. Don Ottavio was given a new aria ('Dalla sua pace') in Act 1, but his Act 2 aria

was replaced by an aria for Donna Elvira which followed a new comic scene for Zerlina and Leporello. Recordings and stage productions almost always conflate both Prague and Vienna, without the comic scene. My own preference is for the original Prague version. In the composite one, Ottavio's gentle 'Dalla sua pace' is an anticlimax after Donna Anna's fiery 'Or sai chi l'onore', while the inclusion of both Ottavio's 'Il mio tesoro' and Elvira's 'Mi tradi' holds up the action which should be moving inexorably to the denouement. Moreover, one could argue that 'Mi tradi' is inconsistent with the portrayal of lovable, gullible Elvira, whose first appearances in each act are subverted by their being overheard by Giovanni and Leporello. Of the recordings detailed in the discography, Östman offers Prague, with the Vienna numbers in an appendix; Gardiner and Jacobs vice versa. Mackerras's CD recording cleverly incorporates alternative versions, the cemetery scene appearing twice. Jurrowski's DVD follows Prague. The others go for the traditional conflation, Furtwängler and Sawallisch omitting 'Dalla sua pace'.

### THE PIONEER

There seem to be few available recordings from before the war. Unlike his 1937 *Die Zauberflöte* (Preiser, 1/96), Joseph Keilberth's *Don Giovanni* from Stuttgart (Walhall, sung in German) is only of curiosity value. But the same year, 1936, saw the third Mozart recording conducted by **Fritz Busch** to emerge from Glyndebourne. Though made under studio conditions, it has all the vigour and flow of

a live performance. Led by John Brownlee's elegant Giovanni and Salvatore Baccaloni's knowing Leporello, the performance still affords enormous pleasure. As for Busch's superb conducting, just relish his steady tempos and – a single example – the sobbing violins in the recitative preceding 'Mi tradi'.

### STILL IN MONO

Skating over Wilhelm Furtwängler (to whom I'll return in the DVD section), we come to **Dimitri Mitropoulos**. The hollowness of the acoustic (from the Salzburg Felsenreitschule during the 1956 festival) doesn't detract from an excellent performance. Giovanni is sung by Cesare Siepi, who pretty well owned the part for 20 years. Like so many, before and since, he is a bass in a baritone role. His sidekick is another veteran, Fernando Corena. As recorded, there's a slight edge – not unpleasing – to the tone of Elisabeth Grümmer's Anna. In a starry cast that includes Lisa Della Casa as Elvira, the Ottavio of Léopold Simoneau stands out with his two arias phrased to perfection. Mitropoulos will have you on the edge of your seat with a spine-chilling orchestral crescendo before the Commendatore's 'Ferma un po' in the finale. There's a small cut in the exchange between Anna and Ottavio during the final sextet.

Siepi, Corena and Della Casa also appear in a powerful account from the New York Met in 1957 conducted by Karl Böhm (*Andromeda*); and it's Siepi again in the 1962 performance from Covent Garden. Here the Leporello is the incomparable Geraint Evans, and it's a joy to hear how he



The chilling hand of fate: a painting (c1830-35) by Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard (1780-1850) of Don Giovanni and the Commendatore

and Siepi play off each other, especially in the recitatives. Leyla Gencer is a forceful Anna, and Richard Lewis shows off his wonderful breath control in Ottavio's arias. If you think that everything conducted by Sir Georg Solti is hard-driven, this may surprise you.

#### THE STEREO ERA

Solti's Elvira, Sena Jurinac, had already recorded the part at least twice; for Ferenc Fricsay in 1958 she switched to Donna Anna. Irmgard Seefried is a warm, charming Zerlina, but despite the casting of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as Giovanni the performance never takes wing (DG, 11/59). It's outclassed by Carlo Maria Giulini's recording of the following year, a set that it is almost impossible to overpraise. Eberhard Waechter and Giuseppe Taddei are excellent as master and man: the former both romantic and dangerous, the latter ironic, with a real feeling for the words in the 'Catalogue' aria. Joan Sutherland in full cry shows what a terrific Wagnerian she could have been, while Elisabeth Schwarzkopf proceeds from a formidable, stately entrance to a fluent, seamless 'Mi tradi'. The Philharmonia plays beautifully and Giulini's pacing is faultless, the balance between comedy and wistfulness just right in the trio 'Ah tacì, ingiusto core'. Another trio, the woodwind-accompanied 'Protegga il giusto cielo', is exquisite. And to have Gottlob Frick as the Commendatore is just the cherry on the cake. The worst that can be said is that the pauses between some of the numbers are a reminder that this is not a production from the theatre.

#### THE HISTORIC CHOICE

Glyndebourne / Busch

Naxos (S) ③ 8 110135/7

Glyndebourne's pre-war recording still packs a powerful punch. Salvatore



Baccaloni's Leporello is superb, and the rest of the cast is fine. But, above all, it's the conducting of Fritz Busch that makes the set unmissable.



The title page: Mozart playing from the score in 1787 for the Viennese aristocracy

There were, however, two associated concert performances at the Royal Festival Hall, London, for which Sir Colin Davis stepped in. His own recording dates from 1972, shortly after he succeeded Solti at Covent Garden. It's interesting to note that Davis follows Giulini in treating the *tutti* 'Viva la libertà ... la libertà!' as one phrase, something he must have remembered from sitting in on Giulini's recording sessions. Apart from a delayed entry at Elvira's return to rescue Zerlina, Davis's recording does have the feel of a theatrical performance, helped along by John Constable's stylish harpsichord continuo. The woodwind chortle delightfully in the 'Catalogue' aria, and the strings in 'Ah tacì,

#### THE MODERN CHOICE

Mahler Chamber Orchestra / Nézet-Séguin

DG (M) ③ 477 9878GH3

Again, it's the conducting that is outstanding here, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin clearly



a born Mozartian. Led by Ildebrando D'Arcangelo and Luca Pisaroni, the singers give their all, with a flawless 'Mi tradi' from Joyce DiDonato.

'ingiusto core' are beautifully pointed. The fine cast includes a honeyed Ottavio from Stuart Burrows.

Honeyed is not the word for Nicolai Ghiaurov's performance for Herbert von Karajan in 1970 – from Salzburg again, but this time at the Grosses Festspielhaus.

Ghiaurov was another bass, and I suspect he found the part uncomfortably high: he snatches at the phrases in an overfast 'Champagne' aria and sounds ungainly rather than seductive in the serenade. Karajan's speeds for their respective arias in Act 2 allow Teresa Zylis-Gara and Gundula Janowitz to phrase unhurriedly, the *pianissimo* reprise of the former's 'Mi tradi' almost thoughtful. Splendid turns from the Welsh team of Burrows and Evans.

Another live recording from Orfeo, Wolfgang Sawallisch in Munich in 1973, was issued only recently. If Ruggero Raimondi is rather bland,

Stafford Dean as Leporello is ample compensation: his dark bass, with a pleasing slight vibrato, makes for a treasurable 'Catalogue' aria, and his vocal impersonation of Raimondi is hilarious. Margaret Price negotiates the coloratura of 'Non mi dir' very well; Lucia Popp is an enchanting Zerlina and there's a powerful Commendatore from Kurt Moll.

Back in Salzburg in 1977 in yet another venue, the Kleines Festspielhaus, the octogenarian Karl Böhm inclines to slow speeds, even in the minuets. Better too slow than too fast, but it comes across as ponderous. The voices are often distant, and the flow of the action is not helped by the disc change after the unmasking of

#### 'HISTORICALLY INFORMED' CHOICE

English Baroque Soloists / Gardiner

DG Archiv (F) ② 445 870-2AH3

Mackerras's CD version certainly qualifies;



but for performance on 'original' instruments the palm goes to John Eliot Gardiner with his excellent cast and the sense of a live performance.

Leporello. Nearly 20 years later, in 1995, Sir **Charles Mackerras** brings his feeling for 18th-century practice to a performance on modern instruments (but with natural trumpets): the bass minims at the beginning of the overture are shortened, the reprise of ‘Dalla sua pace’ is decorated, Masetto and the Commendatore are (as in Mozart’s time) taken by the same singer. It is all very well done, with excellent performances all round, and the layout of the alternative versions is a distinct bonus (remember to omit ‘Dalla sua pace’ for the authentic Prague experience!).

In his recording taken from concert performances, **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** permits some wild decoration from Diana Damrau as Donna Anna, but Mojca Erdmann embellishes Zerlina’s arias charmingly. Joyce DiDonato is dignified, even regretful at the opening of ‘Non ti fidar, o misera’. Her wonderful ‘Mi tradi’ is succeeded by a no less intense ‘Non mi dir’ from Damrau. Luca Pisaroni delivers a serious, almost sinister ‘Catalogue’ aria, and Rolando Villazón brings a welcome virility to ‘Il mio tesoro’. The subtlety of Nézet-Séguin’s conducting is breathtaking.

#### PERIOD-INSTRUMENT RECORDINGS

The trailblazer here is **Arnold Östman**’s 1989 recording from Drottningholm. As noted above, it is Prague plus Vienna appendix; but Elvira’s recitative ‘In quali eccessi’ has been omitted, presumably in order to squeeze the opera on to two discs. Östman’s tempos range from fast to turbocharged, the whole opera (excluding the appendix) over in less than two and a half hours. It’s all a bit too much. **Sir John Eliot Gardiner** in 1994 is a much safer bet, though if you want the Prague version you need to programme tracks 17 to 21 and 9 (not 8) to 16 on CD3. Like Mackerras, Gardiner shortens the bass minims in the overture (and again in the Act 2 finale). Rodney Gilfry is soft and intimate in ‘Là ci darem la mano’, forceful elsewhere, with Ildebrando D’Arcangelo a properly bass Leporello. Luba Orgonášová is made to take the *Allegretto* of ‘Non mi dir’ so fast as to trivialise Anna’s (admittedly tiresome) despair. Charlotte Margiono, on the other hand, is a gentle, un hysterical Elvira, beautifully sung. The recording from the Ludwigsburg Festival has all the tension and flow of a theatre performance. (I recall the concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, when Andrea Silvestrelli’s Commendatore marched down the steps of the auditorium with three trombones in tow.)

Twelve years on, **René Jacobs** also opts for the Vienna version. Others will enjoy his very individual conducting more



Fritz Busch ‘packs a powerful punch’ in 1936

than I do. He plays about with the tempo in Masetto’s aria, speeds up at the end of Giovanni’s ‘Metà di voi qua vadano’,

slows down when Ottavio and Anna enter in the sextet, and speeds up again at Leporello’s ‘Perdon, perdon’. Apart from an unthreatening Commendatore, the cast does well and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra is splendid. As so often in Jacobs’s work, the continuo player is hyperactive: he twiddles throughout, and introduces the cemetery scene as though accompanying a silent film.

Jacobs finds a ready disciple in **Teodor Currentzis** (2015), who offers the composite version including, unusually, the scene for Zerlina and Leporello, with a gratuitous solo violin added to the recitative. The accompaniment to the serenade becomes a duet for lute and fortepiano. But there are enough good moments – Anna bursting headlong into ‘Or sai chi l’onore’, the repose of ‘Protegga il giusto cielo’ – to make this worth hearing.

#### DON GIOVANNI ON DVD

First up is Herbert Graf’s production, filmed by Paul Czinner in the Salzburg Felsenreitschule under studio conditions. The conductor is **Wilhelm Furtwängler**,

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1936	Brownlee <sup>G</sup> , Baccaloni <sup>I</sup> , Souze <sup>A</sup> , Helletsgruber <sup>E</sup> , Glyndebourne Op / <b>Busch</b>	Naxos (S) (3) 8 110135/7 (3/37 <sup>R</sup> , 4/37 <sup>R</sup> , 7/37 <sup>R</sup> , 7/01); Warner Classics (S) (9) 9029 58017-4
1954	Siepi <sup>G</sup> , Edelmann <sup>I</sup> , Grümmer <sup>A</sup> , Della Casa <sup>E</sup> , VPO / <b>Furtwängler</b>	DG (F) <b>DVD</b> 073 019-9GH (7/95 <sup>R</sup> )
1956	Siepi <sup>G</sup> , Corena <sup>I</sup> , Grümmer <sup>A</sup> , Della Casa <sup>E</sup> , VPO / <b>Mitropoulos</b>	Sony (S) (3) 88697 98587-2 (11/94 <sup>R</sup> ); Myto (S) (3) MCD00128
1959	Waechter <sup>G</sup> , Taddei <sup>I</sup> , Sutherland <sup>A</sup> , Schwarzkopf <sup>E</sup> , Philh Orch / <b>Giulini</b>	Warner (F) (3) 2564 69940-5 (12/16); EMI/Warner (S) (3) 966799-2; Alto (S) (3) ALC2502; Regis (S) (9) RRC9013 (2/61 <sup>R</sup> , 1/03 <sup>R</sup> )
1962	Siepi <sup>G</sup> , Evans <sup>I</sup> , Gencer <sup>A</sup> , Jurinac <sup>E</sup> , Royal Op, London / <b>Solti</b>	Royal Opera House Heritage (M) (3) ROHS007 (9/07); Opera d’Oro (S) (3) OPD1452
1970	Ghiaurov <sup>G</sup> , Evans <sup>I</sup> , Janowitz <sup>A</sup> , Zylis-Gara <sup>E</sup> , VPO / <b>Karajan</b>	Orfeo (M) (3) C615 033D (12/03)
1972	Wixell <sup>G</sup> , Ganzarolli <sup>I</sup> , Arroyo <sup>A</sup> , Te Kanawa <sup>E</sup> , Royal Op, London / <b>C Davis</b>	Philips (S) (3) <b>DVD</b> 475 7379 (11/73 <sup>R</sup> , 1/92 <sup>R</sup> )
1973	Raimondi <sup>G</sup> , Dean <sup>I</sup> , M Price <sup>A</sup> , Varady <sup>E</sup> , Bavarian St Orch / <b>Sawallisch</b>	Orfeo (M) (3) C846 153D (5/15)
1977	Milnes <sup>G</sup> , Berry <sup>I</sup> , Tomowa-Sintow <sup>A</sup> , Zylis-Gara <sup>E</sup> , VPO / <b>Böhm</b>	DG (S) (3) 477 5655GOH3 (10/78 <sup>R</sup> )
1978	Raimondi <sup>G</sup> , Van Dam <sup>I</sup> , Moser <sup>A</sup> , Te Kanawa <sup>E</sup> , Paris Op / <b>Maazel</b>	Second Sight (M) (3) <b>DVD</b> 2NDVD3132 (4/08)
1989	Hagegård <sup>G</sup> , Cachemaille <sup>I</sup> , Auger <sup>A</sup> , D Jones <sup>E</sup> ; Drottningholm Court Th Orch / <b>Östman</b>	Decca (S) (2) 470 059-2DF2 (12/90 <sup>R</sup> )
1991	Allen <sup>G</sup> , Furlanetto <sup>I</sup> , James <sup>A</sup> , Vaness <sup>E</sup> , Cologne Gürzenich Orch / <b>Conlon</b>	ArtHaus (F) <b>DVD</b> 100 021 (A/00); (F) <b>DVD</b> 102 319
1994	Gilfry <sup>G</sup> , D’Arcangelo <sup>I</sup> , Orgonášová <sup>A</sup> , Margiono <sup>E</sup> , EBS / <b>Gardiner</b>	DG Archiv (F) (2) 445 870-2AH3 (8/95)
1995	Skovhus <sup>G</sup> , Corbelli <sup>I</sup> , Brewer <sup>A</sup> , Lott <sup>E</sup> , SCO / <b>Mackerras</b>	Telarc (S) (3) CD80726 (11/96 <sup>R</sup> )
2006	Weisser <sup>G</sup> , Regazzo <sup>I</sup> , Pasichnyk <sup>A</sup> , Pendatchanska <sup>E</sup> ; Freiburg Baroque Orch / <b>Jacobs</b>	Harmonia Mundi (M) (3) HMC90 1964/6 (A/07)
2008	Keenlyside <sup>G</sup> , Ketelsen <sup>I</sup> , Poplavskaya <sup>A</sup> , DiDonato <sup>E</sup> , Royal Op, London / <b>Mackerras</b>	Opus Arte (F) (2) <b>DVD</b> OA1009D; (F) <b>DVD</b> OABD7028D (7/09); (B) (5) <b>DVD</b> OA1150BD; (F) (5) <b>DVD</b> OABD7155BD
2010	Finley <sup>G</sup> , Pisaroni <sup>I</sup> , Samuil <sup>A</sup> , Royal <sup>E</sup> , OAE / <b>Jurrowski</b>	EMI (M) (2) <b>DVD</b> 072017-9 (8/11)
2011	D’Arcangelo <sup>G</sup> , Pisaroni <sup>I</sup> , Damrau <sup>A</sup> , DiDonato <sup>E</sup> ; Mahler CO / <b>Nézet-Séguin</b>	DG (M) (3) 477 9878GH3 (12/12)
2014	D’Arcangelo <sup>G</sup> , Pisaroni <sup>I</sup> , Ruiten <sup>A</sup> , Fritsch <sup>E</sup> , VPO / <b>Eschenbach</b>	EuroArts (F) (2) <b>DVD</b> 207 2738; (F) <b>DVD</b> 207 2734 (10/15)
2014	Kwiecier <sup>G</sup> , Esposito <sup>I</sup> , Byström <sup>A</sup> , Gens <sup>E</sup> , Royal Op, London / <b>Luisotti</b>	Opus Arte (F) <b>DVD</b> OA1145D; (F) <b>DVD</b> OABD7152D (12/14)
2015	Tiliakos <sup>G</sup> , Priante <sup>I</sup> , Papatanasiu <sup>A</sup> , Gauvin <sup>E</sup> , MusicAeterna / <b>Currentzis</b>	Sony (M) (3) 88985 31603-2 (11/16); (F) (4) <b>DVD</b> 88985 31605-1

Key: <sup>G</sup>Don Giovanni <sup>I</sup>Leporello <sup>A</sup>Donna Anna <sup>E</sup>Donna Elvira

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Giulini (left) in 1959 with Sciutti (third from left), Waechter (second from right) and Sutherland (right)

recorded only a few months before his death in November 1954. I'm not sure if it's lip-synched: we certainly see the great man conducting the orchestra 'live'. The cast includes the young Walter Berry as a dangerous Masetto and Cesare Siepi in his prime, playing Don Giovanni as an Errol Flynn swashbuckler. He and Otto Edelmann horse about amusingly in 'Ah taci, ingiusto core', but one rather misses the laughter of an audience. Grümmer and Della Casa are wonderful. It's an old-fashioned production in faded colour: not a first choice, but not to be missed. Neither is the 1978 film by Joseph Losey, shot in Venice and Vicenza, mainly in Palladio's Villa Rotonda. The Mozart scholar Julian Rushton consigns it to a category of 'elegant imbecilities', but I find it a beautiful and imaginative production, respectful of the score in a way that Zeffirelli's film of *Otello* is not. The prerecorded Paris Opera Orchestra under Lorin Maazel is no great shakes, but the singing and acting are excellent. The *secco* recitatives were recorded 'live'. The sinister, silent valet in black is an unnecessary addition, but not annoying enough to spoil the whole.

Sir Peter Hall's 1977 Glyndebourne production (ArtHaus; conductor Bernard Haitink) is valuable for preserving the interpretations of Benjamin Luxon and Stafford Dean as Giovanni and Leporello, but the Regency setting doesn't feel right – and the subtitles are woefully out of sync. (Haitink returned to the opera six years later with his *Gramophone* Award-winning audio recording – EMI/Warner, 7/84.) The subtitles in Michael Hampe's 1991 production from Cologne

are pretty erratic too, as well as being approximate. But, conducted by James Conlon, this is well worth investigating as an example of a traditional, no-nonsense staging that's visually arresting (Elvira appears on her balcony in a lovely golden-brown light). Thomas Allen, with mandolin (not a given, these days), sings an exquisite serenade.

Two productions come from Covent Garden. The first (2008), conducted by Charles Mackerras, is the better. Francesca Zambello's direction has its oddities (Giovanni is bare-chested at his own dinner party; the Commendatore appears as himself, not as a statue) but in general is straightforward. Simon Keenlyside as Giovanni has a nice line in witty or humorous asides. DiDonato's Elvira, bent on revenge, makes her entrance with a musket as well as a telescope. She takes 'Mi tradi' a semitone lower, sanctioned by Mozart, as she does for Nézet-Séguin: heartfelt and beautifully controlled. Six years later, Kasper Holten's production was very well filmed by Jonathan Haswell, the singers' facial expressions always a delight. The sets and video designs are clever and imaginative. There's too much eavesdropping, though: Giovanni observes many of the arias, including Elvira's 'Mi tradi' and Anna's 'Non mi dir'.

Nicola Luisotti conducts well, but he should not have agreed to the huge cut in the final sextet. At the end, Mariusz Kwiecień is alone, miserable and fearful.

Vladimir Jurowski at Glyndebourne (2010) follows the Vienna version to the letter, including (uniquely, as far as I know) a shorter passage for the characters arriving

after Giovanni's demise, and the complete omission of the following duet. The setting is Franco's Spain in 1960: dark glasses, white dinner jackets, cigarettes, Polaroid cameras. The music at Giovanni's supper comes from a transistor radio. Gerald Finley murders Brindley Sherratt's unarmed Commendatore with a brick, after which he is charm itself. He is very good at showing embarrassment when Giovanni tries to deal with the other three characters in 'Non ti fidar, o misera'. Anna Samuil's Donna Anna is obsessed with her father, not with Giovanni; Kate Royal's Elvira is obsessed with Giovanni to the last. And there's excellent playing from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

It's back to Salzburg for Sven-Eric Bechtolf's 2014 production. Pisaroni reappears as Leporello, which he had already sung for Jurowski and Nézet-Séguin; his master (as on the latter set) is Gardiner's Leporello, D'Arcangelo. The setting is the lobby of a hotel. Elvira sings her entrance aria behind the bar; later, a masked demon serves drinks to the masked trio and, now in cloak and topper, enables Giovanni to escape his accusers. Anna gets aroused while recounting Giovanni's attempt on her virtue; Zerlina and Masetto strip down to their underwear during 'Vedrai, carino'. Christoph Eschenbach is well served by his singers and the Vienna Philharmonic; Anett Fritsch's 'Mi tradi' is the nearest to Elizabeth Vaughan's at Covent Garden years ago – the most passionate, despairing Elvira that I can remember.

Don Giovanni is brave, defiant to the last. All but one of the other characters move on; in the end, it's poor Elvira, retiring to a convent, who suffers the most. No single stage production can cover all the aspects of this fascinating opera, so perhaps one can get more out of it by using one's imagination. Consequently, there's no top DVD recommendation, and any CD recommendation comes with a caveat about the version used: Prague, Vienna or (sort of) both? I've omitted the real stinkers, so you can't go far wrong with any of the recordings listed; but Giulini is still ahead of the field. ⚪

## THE TOP CHOICE

**Philharmonia Orchestra / Giulini**

EMI/Warner (S) ③ 966799-2

Nearly 60 years on, this is still wonderful. In addition to those mentioned above, the cast



includes Graziella Sciutti, Piero Cappuccilli and Luigi Alva. Giulini (a late replacement for Klemperer) can't be faulted. For a more 'theatrical' affair, try Davis.

# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

## Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & cinemas worldwide

### Carmen, March 6

*Carmen* may be a traditional operatic favourite, but it appears in far-from-traditional guise in the Australian director Barrie Kosky's production originally created for Frankfurt Opera; highly physical to watch, its musical dimension comes slightly refreshed thanks to the inclusion of music written by Bizet for the score but not usually heard. More freshness to this particular performance comes from the fact that it's conducted by the Czech conductor Jakub Hrůša in what will be his Covent Garden debut. The cast is strong too: Anna Goryachova in the title role, with Francesco Meli as Don José. Kristina Mkhitarian sings Micaëla, and Kostas Smoriginas is Escamillo.

[roh.co.uk/showings](http://roh.co.uk/showings)

## Gothenburg Concert Hall & online at GSoplay

### Beethoven from Grimaud and Rouvali, March 9

The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra's 2017-18 Artist in Residence Hélène Grimaud is the soloist for this free, live-streamed performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4, led by its new Chief Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali. Music from Rouvali's homeland also features on the programme, in the form

of Sibelius's Symphony No 1, and the concert opens with Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite. Miss it live, and you can catch it online afterwards; and beyond the HD viewing and high-quality sound, it's also worth us reminding you that if you download the Apple and Android-compatible GSoplay app, and are willing to pay for its Premium version (there's a free version too), then you can download the concert to watch offline.

[gso.se/en/gsoplay](http://gso.se/en/gsoplay)

## Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich & online BR-Klassik

### Haitink conducts Brahms, March 9

The Bavarian broadcaster BR-Klassik has seriously upped its game in terms of live video streaming over the past 12 months, meaning that we now get to see Munich's various different concert venues, including the Prinzregententheater and the Herkulessaal, along with studio concerts and even concerts from Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. This performance of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* in Munich's Philharmonie im Gasteig sees Bernard Haitink conduct the Bavarian RSO and its Chorus alongside soloists Camilla Tilling (soprano), and Hanno Müller-Brachmann (baritone). If you can't catch it live, then it will remain online afterwards.

[br-klassik.de](http://br-klassik.de)

## ONLINE EVENSONG REVIEW

### New College Choir, Oxford stream their evensong services, giving a valuable snapshot of a fine choir on top form

#### Evensong

New College Choir became the first of its kind to audio-webcast under Edward Higginbottom. Now the process offers real-time insights into Robert Quinney's work to tame this most expressionistic of church choirs without numbing its character. Unadorned sound shows how much the chapel's unforgiving acoustic calls the shots.

Trebles, in particular, get little acoustic support. But these broadcasts were never designed for critical appraisal; in their variance and imperfection is also their magic and authenticity. From a flurry of services posted in the final weeks of 2017 (presented on a redesigned site from 2018),



two carol services offer rare, touching strophic works by Barnby, Fleming and Goldschmidt which prove that advanced musicianship is often best revealed by simple music.

Likewise in psalms from Michaelmas term evensongs. They adhere to New College's style of old: skipping, rooted in text, with

shortened syllables and rapid antiphonal handovers. The choir has long excelled in Baroque music and it's good to hear it present Walmisley's maligned Evening Service in D minor in neo-Baroque vein (Sixth Week). The sharp edges of Leighton's Second Service (Third Week) are also perfect for ensemble, space and organ. In two Brahms motets (Sixth and

Fifth Weeks) musicianship leaps over the acoustic hurdles and more exquisite organ playing helps. We hear the instrument's new 32-foot Fagot in Bach's *Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland* from the Advent carol service. **Andrew Mellor**

Available to stream for free at [newcollegechoir.com](http://newcollegechoir.com)

## Palau de la Música Catalana, Barcelona

### International Maria Canals Music Competition, March 10-23

One for competition watchers, it's piano year at the International Maria Canals Music Competition, so you can watch an international line-up of young pianists aged anywhere between 18 and 30 compete for a cash first prize which, at €25,000, is at the upper end of the monetary prize scale. There's also a long list of other special prizes including concert engagements, a recording and concert tour of China. The competition has a very healthy array of remote engagement options too, with events broadcast live online, and videos of each round available on the website within hours after each session. The Catalan classical music radio station Catalunya Musica then broadcasts the final live.

[mariacanals.org](http://mariacanals.org)

## Nationaltheater, Munich & online

### Les Vêpres siciliennes, March 18

Not one of the most regularly performed of Verdi's operas (especially in its French-language version), his epic-scaled *Les Vêpres siciliennes* deals with the irreconcilable enmity between Sicilians and their French occupiers, with a blood-soaked conclusion to its five acts. It's perfect subject matter for the director of Bavarian State Opera's new production,

## Dieter Flury, the Vienna Phil's Principal Flute, steps down from the orchestra in an impressive farewell concert

### Brahms • Widmann

Dieter Flury, Principal Flute of the Vienna Philharmonic from 1981 to 2017, is celebrated in his farewell concert, recorded live last June (and now available to stream exclusively on Idagio). Christian Thielemann conducted a programme that cleverly folds time back on itself. The farewell element is a performance of Jörg Widmann's Bach-inspired *Flûte en Suite*, played by Flury and followed by a couple of encores.

The Widmann work, a concerto in all but name, was written for the Cleveland Orchestra and premiered there in 2011 by its Principal Joshua Smith. It is couched in the form of an eight-movement Baroque suite complete with a cadenza (partly vocalised) and two chorales. What makes Widmann's musical voice so powerful, and appealing, is his acknowledgement of musical traditions and an engagement with those traditions



in the language of today. In *Flûte en Suite* this manifests itself with brief and often witty quotations of Bach's Second Orchestral Suite over a harmonically rich and exciting orchestral line. Flury's playing is wonderfully fleet of foot and beautifully focused (as you'd expect from a player who can negotiate Telemann's solo works so adeptly), but also highly expressive. Thielemann's control of the various orchestral groups (who come together for the final Badinerie)

is masterly. I particularly like the opening Allemande which employs every member of the flute family (from bass up to piccolo) to ravishing effect. Encores, solo, by Telemann and Bach (the A minor Partita's Sarabande) reconnect us to the Suite's spiritual origins.

The concert is bookended by Brahms (also a great admirer of the music of JS Bach). A dramatic reading of the *Academic Festival Overture* to open and, to close, a beautifully soft-grained Brahms Fourth, the Vienna strings as silky as you'd imagine, every transition smoothly taken, though occasionally erupting with surprising brutality (as in the third movement). Not a performance you'd necessarily want to live with but a reminder of a great orchestra on top form, and one that Flury must have stepped away from with many emotions. **James Jolly**

**Available as part of a monthly €9.99 subscription, at [idagio.com](http://idagio.com) (a free trial membership is offered).**

Antú Romero Nunes, who as house director at Hamburg's Thalia Theater is known for his penchant for adapting literary works which focus on the great questions of human existence. Omer Meir Wellber conducts a cast headed up by Carmen Giannattasio as Hélène and Bryan Hymel as her lover Henri, and while the production runs from March 9 to 11, it's March 18 when you can catch it, live streamed, on the company's streaming platform and film archive.

[staatsoper.de](http://staatsoper.de) / [staatsoper.tv](http://staatsoper.tv)

### Philharmonie, Berlin & online

#### Isserlis plays Dutilleux, March 20

The cellist Steven Isserlis joins the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie – all students from Germany's conservatories – under the conductor David Afkham for a rather delicious-looking French programme. Messiaen's *Les Offrandes oubliées* opens the programme, Isserlis joins them for Dutilleux's *Tout un monde lointain...* – written in the late 1960s for Mstislav Rostropovich and now a modern repertoire work – and the evening closes with Berlioz's ever-original *Symphonie fantastique*. Catch it live or in the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall [digitalconcerthall.com](http://digitalconcerthall.com)

### The Jerome L Greene Performance Space, New York & online

#### 2018 Avery Fisher Career Grant Winners, March 22 & April 24

Anyone interested in rising young artists will want to tune into this live video-streamed concert from WQXR's intimate recital venue, The Jerome L Greene Performance Space, because it features the 2018 Avery Fisher Career Grant winners who will only have been announced that day. Each year New York's Lincoln Center Avery Fisher Artist Program offers up to five career grants of \$25,000 to give professional assistance and recognition to talented instrumentalists (either US citizens, or permanent residents) who the Program's Executive Committee believes have potential for solo careers. Chamber ensembles are also eligible. They're certainly good at picking their artists too: among the 2017 recipients were the Dover Quartet and violinists Steven Waarts and Chad Hoopes, while back in 2010 the recipients included the pianists Yuja Wang, and Kirill Gerstein in 2016. Winners in the intervening years include the Escher Quartet, the Calder Quartet, violinists Tessa Lark, Caroline Goulding and Benjamin Beilman, and pianist George Li. The announcement and performances are being streamed live at 6pm (EST) on March 22, and then broadcast on WQXR at 9pm (EST) on April 24. [thegreenespace.org](http://thegreenespace.org), [wqxr.org](http://wqxr.org)

### Grieghallen, Bergen

#### Gardner conducts Verdi's Requiem, March 23

Edward Gardner leads a seriously tempting line-up of soloists for this performance of

Verdi's Requiem, because joining the Bergen Philharmonic, the Bergen Filharmoniske Choir and the Collegium Mūsicūms Choir are Lise Davidsen (soprano – a singer with a huge career ahead of her), Jennifer Johnston (mezzo), René Barbera (tenor) and Matthew Rose (bass). The Requiem is performed on both March 22 and 23, but we're particularly flagging up the second night because this is the one you can watch live streamed for free, on [BergenPhilLive](http://BergenPhilLive), or indeed afterwards from its archive.

[bergenphilive.no](http://bergenphilive.no)

### Grand Théâtre de Provence, Aix-en-Provence & Radio Classique

#### Renaud Capuçon conducts Camerata Salzburg, March 28

Yes, that's right, Renaud Capuçon is swapping his violin bow for a conductor's baton for this concert from his own Festival de Pâques, conducting Camerata Salzburg in Mozart's Serenade No 9 in D, K320. He'll then lead from his violin for the programme's two other works. First, Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante*, for which he's joined by his long-time musical collaborator and festival stalwart, viola player Gérard Caussé; and then a work we don't hear all that often on the concert platform, Paul Ben-Haim's post-Romantic (and tonal) Violin Concerto of 1947. The concert is being broadcast live on France's classical music station, Radio Classique.

[festivalpaques.com](http://festivalpaques.com), [radioclassique.fr](http://radioclassique.fr)

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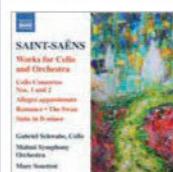
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THIS MONTH a novel pocket streaming solution and an over-achieving pair of speakers from a famous British name.

**Andrew Everard**  
Audio Editor

## MARCH TEST DISCS



This beautifully focused Naxos recording of Saint-Saëns cello works really shines in its 96kHz/24-bit version, packed with detail and with a lovely delicacy



'Soaring' just about covers the presence of this collaboration between Bartoli and Gabetta in dramatic, demonstration-quality sound

## Could the music centre be making a comeback?

Two new all-in-one turntable systems have a decidedly 'we've been here before' feel about them



Were you to want any more proof that the much-vaunted vinyl revival is trying to find ways to break out of its 'hipster' niche and embrace the mainstream, the arrival of two new turntable-based systems should suffice. Both feature not just a record player but also built-in amplification, meaning the buyer need only add a pair of speakers. Yes, it looks like the music centre could be making a comeback.

The first comes from familiar turntable manufacturer Pro-Ject, which regular readers will know seems to come up with a new twist on the record-playing theme every month. The latest is the JukeBox E ①, combining a modified version of the company's Primary turntable, complete with fitted Ortofon OM5E cartridge, with a built in phono pre-amp and amplifier and Bluetooth wireless connectivity. The amplifier has a 50W-per-channel output and there's an additional line input for an external source component, plus phono outputs for use with an external amplifier if required. The supplied remote also accesses the tone and loudness controls, and the JukeBox E, which comes in a choice of red, white or black, sells for £369. It can also be bought in a money-saving bundle with the company's SpeakerBox 5 speakers, available in matching colours, for £499.

Also new is US-based +Audio's The+RecordPlayer ②, one of three models from this company. It offers a similar specification to the Pro-Ject, even having a Pro-Ject tonearm and Ortofon cartridge, but adds to the specification an optical digital input and a USB connection, through which one can record music to a computer or play computer music through the system's amplifier. It also has built-in speakers for a true one-box solution, complete with a 'wide' setting for a more room-filling sound, and sells for £799. The other +Audio offerings are a tabletop radio, the £225 The+Radio DAB+, and a stereo version at £335.

Bringing the worlds of records and computer audio together is the latest amplifier from British company Leema. The £2295 Pulse IV amplifier ③ has the company's Essentials moving coil/moving magnet phono stage (which sells for £595 alone) built-in, along with five analogue and seven digital inputs including a USB Type B for direct connection of a computer, and Bluetooth with aptX. Delivering 80W per channel, it can handle digital audio formats up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD thanks to its ESS Sabre DAC, and is handbuilt by Leema in Wales.

Also offering streaming solutions is Norwegian company Electrocompaniet, with its Tana and Rena models ④. The range starts at £665 for the Tana SL-1,

which is an all-in-one streaming speaker with Wi-Fi and a USB input, complete with 150W of built-in amplification: it can be used alone or with the £556 L-1 active add-on speaker to create a stereo pair. It's part of the company's EC Living range, which also includes the Rena £582 S-1 and £610 SA-1, the former being a wireless music streamer designed for use with existing systems, the latter adding amplification for a 'just add speakers' solution. Other Electrocompaniet products can also work with these devices to create a multiroom system, including the EC-1 6DX streamer/amp.

Finally, if whole-house hi-fi isn't enough for you, Naim has expanded from its systems designed for Bentley cars into an alliance with luxury yacht manufacturer Princess. The Naim for Princess line was launched with the Plymouth-based boatbuilder's recently announced Princess S78 model ⑤, and uses the company's Uniti range of products. Uniti Atoms are fitted on the yacht's sportbridge and in the saloon, cockpit and master stateroom for multiroom audio, while a premium upgrade adds a Uniti Star in the saloon, uprated speakers and additional zones on the foredeck and in the guest and crew areas. The Princess S78 is 24.66m long, is capable of 39 knots thanks to two 1900hp V12 engines and can sleep six plus two crew. The price? If you have to ask ... ⑥

## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

### Chord Poly

This pocket-size add-on turns the Chord Mojo into a complete portable streaming solution

Just once in a while, all the hoopla surrounding the launch of a new product is justified by the item in question – and that was certainly the case when Chord Electronics rolled out its Mojo DAC/headphone amplifier a couple of years back at a lunch at the top of London's Shard. Here was a high-end digital component miniaturised down to the point where one could take it anywhere, powered by batteries and able to be used with anything from a CD player or computer right the way through to smartphones and tablets.

That Chord had launched such a product was hardly a surprise: after all, the company already had on its books the 2Qute DAC and the Hugo battery-powered DAC/headphone amp, now in MkII form. So it seemed logical to make the already compact designs even smaller, to appeal to the so-called 'iPhone generation' – which, incidentally, now seems to stretch from children all the way up to very senior citizens, if my friends and acquaintances are typical.

What was more of an eye-opener when Chord revealed its new baby was not only that the palm-size product felt reassuringly chunky and 'serious' in its machined aluminium casework but also that it was built around the company's in-house digital-to-analogue technology. That's always been seen as Chord doing things the hard way in the search of quality; rather than using the off-the-shelf DAC chips found in just about every other digital device on the market, the company's digital guru Rob Watts 'builds his own', running in complex software

#### CHORD POLY

**Type** Network music player

**Price** £499

**Inputs** microSD card reader, Bluetooth, AirPlay, DLNA, Roon

**Connectivity** Wi-Fi

**Formats played** PCM up to 768kHz, DSD to 5.6MHz (depending on source/connection); AAC, WAV, FLAC, AIFF, OGG VORBIS, ALAC, WMA and MP3

**Outputs** Dedicated digital connection to Chord Mojo DAC/headphone amp (£399); can also serve content on microSD to other DLNA devices

**Remote control** Via third-party apps on smartphone/tablet, or via Roon



**Battery life** up to nine hours from a four-hour charge

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 6.2x2.2x5cm  
[chordelectronics.co.uk](http://chordelectronics.co.uk)

on processing chips known as Field Programmable Gate Arrays – but it was quite surprising to find this apparently expensive approach used in a highly affordable 'pocket DAC'. What's more, it was notable that rather than putting this model out to contract manufacturing in a lower-cost country, as most would do, Chord was building the Mojo as it did the rest of its range – in house at its factory in Kent, which is a converted pumphouse originally built to supply water from the Medway to Maidstone.

Chord Electronics boss John Franks explained at the time that the numbers added up on the Mojo because the company was aiming to sell the little DAC/amplifier in huge numbers, which would amortise the initial costs over the production run. His numbers were persuasive, suggesting that if the company

managed to sell to just a minute fraction of the iPhone owners out there, it would be very happy indeed.

At that event, Franks was also delightedly showing off a little plug-in box, designed to clip on to the end of the Mojo and add functionality – albeit at that point very much in mock-up form. Two years later, the Poly is here, and combined with the Mojo it creates a very potent pocketable music system.

Selling for £499 and designed only to be used with the £399 Mojo, the Poly adds playback from microSD cards of the kind used by other pocket music players, as well as DLNA music streaming when connected to a home Wi-Fi network, and both AirPlay and Bluetooth streaming directly from phones, tablets and computers. It can also be configured to operate as a Roon endpoint, so if you have a computer

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Poly needs the Mojo to work, of course, but here's how to build a system around it ...

### MACMINI

The simplest source for the Poly will be a home computer – a simple laptop will do, or the likes of a MacMini (used from about £150 or so) controlled by a phone app.



### THE MOJO/POLY

The Mojo/Poly combination will drive a wide range of headphones: try it with a high-quality pair of in-ears such as the excellent Final Heaven IV.



running Roon, you can play music to the Mojo/Poly – or is it MojoPoly? – including Tidal online streaming, and can stream content stored on microSD cards to other DLNA devices on your network. What's more, the combination retains the wide-ranging playback capability of the Mojo, allowing files of up to 768kHz sampling rate or DSD256/2.8MHz to be played; however, if it's used for network streaming the limitation is going to be the throughput of your home network, of which more later.

As with the Mojo, the Poly has its own internal battery, charged via a micro USB cable from a computer or a plugtop charger of the kind used for mobile phones. It's possible to 'charge through' with the Poly in place but one should ensure one has a charger with sufficient heft. It's also worth noting that both Mojo and Poly run quite warm when in use: this can be slightly alarming at first but is symptomatic of the sheer amount of electronics packed into both, Chord reassuring users that it's quite normal and both devices have internal protection should things get too warm.

### PERFORMANCE

Setting up the Poly is relatively simple but should become easier still once Chord's forthcoming GoFigure app for Android and iOS is in place. For now, one has to put the device into set-up mode by pressing a hidden button below the microSD card slot – Chord supplies a pin such as that used to change SIM cards on phones for just this purpose – which then sets up a temporary hotspot. Connect a phone or tablet to that via Wi-Fi and a screen appears allowing one to select the mode in which the Poly works and 'tune it in' to your home network. There are also little voice messages to tell you which mode the Poly is in when the button is pressed. Control of the Poly relies on third-party software running on a tablet or smartphone. There's no dedicated app for the Chord device but the likes of Linn's Kinsky app and others will 'find' the Poly and enable music to be played to it. Yes, a Chord app would be good; but the available free alternatives out there work well enough.

The alternative is to use Roon, as I did with my home set-up, controlling the playback using the Roon Remote app on my iPhone with the Mojo/Poly driving either a pair of headphones or fed into my hi-fi systems via a 3.5mm-to-RCA adaptor. It's worth noting that one should set up Roon to downsample to 192kHz/24-bit, especially if you have a library containing contents at higher sampling rates: the limitations of Wi-Fi mean that playback will be stuttery or just fail completely if you try to push beyond this.

That aside, the Poly soon proves itself to be no novelty item but a very competent playback device, transcending any assumed limitations brought about by its compact size. The built-in battery is good for nine hours' use – one less than the Mojo manages, depending on volume levels – and the sound of the combination is every bit as thrilling and precise as that of the Mojo alone, with excellent bass weight and bags of detail and ambience.

**The Poly proves itself to be no novelty item but a very competent playback device, transcending any assumed limitations**

As readers of *Gramophone* might hope, this is far from being a system with a sound 'hyped' up to please the listener more interested in commercial rock and pop recordings: indeed, such content can be revealed to be over-processed, dynamically flattened and just generally trying too hard. Rather, the 'MojoPoly' revels in high-quality recordings, bringing out all the presence and information in a high-resolution set to attention-grabbing effect.

But it's also rich-sounding, both in overall weight and the way it reveals instrumental and vocal textures, serving simple instrumental recordings as well as it does large-scale works. The recent live set of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (Erato, 12/17) benefits from this combination of scale and attention to detail, but the Chord duo is just adept with the more delicate touch of Sabine Devieilhe's 'Mirages' set (12/17), handling the soprano's voice with lovely fluidity and power, and sounding spine-

## Or you could try ...

**Tricky one, this, as there's nothing else on the market quite like the Mojo/Poly combination.**

### Meridian Explorer2

One alternative is to try a good portable DAC with laptop computer, such as the Meridian Explorer2, at around £200. It may lack the built-in card player and streaming capability of the Poly but it does have MQA decoding to allow it to play Masters quality music from Tidal. It sounds superb, too, and is small enough to go anywhere. Details at [meridian-audio.com](http://meridian-audio.com).



### Onkyo DP-S1

Another approach would be to go for a digital audio player with built-in streaming capability, such as the Onkyo DP-S1 tested in these pages in the January issue. Not only does it have built-in storage and the ability to be expanded with microSD cards, it also handles ultra-hi-res music and can also connect to Wi-Fi to stream music from services such as Tidal, complete with MQA decoding. It sells for £400 and you can find out more at [eu.onkyo.com](http://eu.onkyo.com).



### Astell&Kern Kann

Finally, if you want a luxury mobile music solution, the Astell&Kern Kann might be the answer. There are more compact machines on the market but the A&K compensates for its relative bulk with a great sound and the ability to take (harder to lose) full-size SD cards as well as the micro versions. Use both slots, plus the internal memory, and you can carry over 800GB of music with you, or more than 1000 albums at full CD quality. Available in a choice of blue or silver and with Tidal streaming also built-in, the Kann sells for £899. More details at [astellkern.com](http://astellkern.com).



tingling, especially through high-quality headphones. In short, whether used as a portable device or a system source, the Chord Mojo/Poly combination is nothing less than a remarkable achievement. **•**

## ● REVIEW BOWERS & WILKINS 706 S2

# Good looks and serious sound

The second-smallest loudspeaker in the British company's new 700 series is undeniably a luxury mini-monitor

**W**hen you've just completed a total overhaul of your flagship speaker range, to the extent of changing just about every component in each of the models, what do you do next? Well, when the latest Bowers & Wilkins 800 series models were appearing, it seems the company was already working on the line-up below it, the CM2 range – despite those models only having been launched a bit over four years ago.

It seems all the developments involved in making the 800 Series Diamond got the Bowers & Wilkins designers thinking about how they could be trickled down into more affordable 700 series models. But the thinking was also pragmatic, in that the decision was taken to stick with the (extremely high-quality) cabinets already in use for the CM2 models and concentrate on improvements to the drive units and other components. With so much 800-series derived technology here, the decision was made to adopt the 700 S2 numbering for the new range.

All the drive units have been changed. The tweeter is a Decoupled Carbon Dome design, with an aluminium structure on to which carbon is deposited, and with a stiffening ring to the rear of the main dome, while the mid-range driver – or mid/bass on the smaller models – uses the same Continuum Cone material found in the mid-range drivers of the 800 Series Diamond range, replacing the long-running Kevlar cones of the CM2 series. Like the Kevlar this is a woven material; and while the company is still reticent to share exactly what the material is, its coated construction is said to provide better control of break-up, and thus better mid-range openness and neutrality. In the larger speakers, bass duties are handled by a version of the Aerofoil-cone bass driver developed for the 800 models. Named for its wing-like radial cross-section, this uses carbon fibre skins over a foam core in the flagship speakers, and paper over a different foam formulation in the new 700s.

The range starts with the little 707 S2, which sells for £800 a pair, and goes up to the £3300/pr 702 S2 floorstanders; the 706 S2 we have here is the mid-range model of three standmounters in the line-up, at £1100/pr, supplied for review with a pair of smart FS-700 S2 stands, adding £400 to the bill. The 706 S2 is a nicely proportioned

and elegant-looking speaker, standing some 34cm tall and 20cm wide, meaning the 16.5cm drive unit extends almost the full width of the front baffle, with the 25mm tweeter sitting above it. The standard of finish is excellent, especially in the deep Gloss Black of the review pair – Satin White and Rosenut are also available – and the hidden magnetic grille fixings keep the front of the speaker clean-looking. To the rear are the cable terminals and the signature Bowers & Wilkins Flowport, which uses golf-ball-style texturing to speed and smooth the flow of air, while the electrical characteristics of the speaker make it relatively easy to use, with 88dB/W/m sensitivity, 8 ohm nominal impedance and a 30-120W recommended amplification range.

### PERFORMANCE

In accordance with the instruction manual, I set the speakers up on the supplied stands around 0.5m in from rear and side walls, allowing the ports to work without excessive boom, and after some listening and experimentation angled them in a little towards the listening position for the best stereo imaging. Two-piece foam plugs, comprising an inner core and an outer ring, can be used in the ports to tighten the bass if required but I found it better to keep the speakers well clear of the walls for the best combination of weight and sound-stage depth. I also mass-loaded the stands as suggested: the manual suggests kiln-dried sand but I used Atacama's Atabites metal chips, not least because they're easier to remove and reuse when a stand needs to be returned after review.

Thus installed, the (relatively) little speakers prove more than capable of being used with some very serious amplification to good effect. I used them with both my veteran Naim NA52/52PS/NAP250 set-up and the NAD C388 reviewed last month, and with both amplifiers they delivered a sound of striking focus and detail, along with rather more bass than you might expect from boxes so small. Yes, there are limits to the low-frequency extension, but the 706 S2 speakers do a very good job of covering their tracks and delivering a full, involving sound. The presentation is very much that of a mini-monitor, as befits the role of the larger 800 series speakers in so many well-known studios: the sound is



### BOWERS & WILKINS 706 S2

**Type** Two-way standmount speakers

**Price** £1099/pr

**Drive units** 25mm Decoupled Carbon Dome tweeter, 16.5cm Continuum Cone mid/bass

**Sensitivity** 88dB/W/m

**Impedance** 8 ohm nominal,  
3.1 ohm minimum

**Amplifier requirements** 3-120W

**Accessories supplied** Grilles, port bungs

**Optional accessories** FS-700 S2 stands (£399)

**Finishes** Gloss black, satin white, rosewood

**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 340x200x28.5cm  
[bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://bowers-wilkins.co.uk)

packed with information but delivered in an entirely smooth and integrated fashion to ensure the listener's attention is firmly on the music. Playing the recent Monteverdi Choir disc of Bach choral works (SDG, 12/17) revealed the ability of the speakers to open up the layers of this understandably dense recording and create a beautifully three-dimensional sonic picture before the listener, the richness of the voices and the fine detail of the orchestration subtly balanced.

These are highly informative speakers but not at the expense of musicality. There's none of that sense of information being hurled at you, but instead a cultured, mature presentation of the music being played. Load up mezzo Marianne Crebassa's 'Secrets' album of French songs, beautifully accompanied by Fazil Say (Erato, 12/17), and the way these speakers 'hang' the voice in the lively acoustic is certainly attention-grabbing, while the piano is beautifully placed just in the background. And while these speakers wouldn't perhaps be the first choice for those who like their orchestral music delivered full-force, in that something with a more resounding bass weight might be more suitable, with the dynamics of this set they're entirely thrilling.

Without a doubt the 706 S2s are at the upper end of the small speaker spectrum in terms of price but they're a tempting prospect on both sonic and cosmetic grounds, and deserve a serious audition. **G**

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## ESSAY

# No such thing as a free music collection

There have never been more ways of accessing your music, nor of playing it. But Andrew Everard says there's good reason to buy both new releases and high-quality equipment

**A**pparently, I'm stupid. Trying to explain to some teenagers of my acquaintance that the music playing in my car was both bought and paid for, then ripped to a USB stick for playback on the move, I was met with no shortage of incredulity. 'Listen', said one, and in seconds a tinny din filled the back seat of the vehicle – the headphones had been unplugged from the iPhone and I was 'enjoying' the latest offering from YouTube.

'See? It's free – and all you need is your phone. Why are you wasting so much money?'

I momentarily considered – and then dismissed as futile – explaining that their effortless streaming was being made possible by the car's Wi-Fi hotspot, on to which they had somehow found their way (note to self: never leave teenagers unaccompanied in the car). However, in the time that thought took me, we had already flicked through at least four 'tunes' on two different phones, before the headphones were reinserted and the car's sound system again had a chance – well, give or take the shouted conversation going on between two ear-plugged teenagers simultaneously SnapFacing their friends while listening.

Meanwhile back in Old Codgerville, I'd started thinking that the much-bemoaned 'iPhone generation', so often cited by hi-fi companies as the reason for declining sales, is itself being supplanted by the streaming hordes, for whom music isn't just free because it's pirated and swapped as computer files, but available for nothing like an amazing online audio pick'n'mix. Forget 'these days no one has the attention span to listen to a whole album' – that went west when it became possible to download by the song, not by the album; these days it seems there's a marked reluctance to make it through a whole track without flipping to something else.

If a three-minute burst of music is two minutes too long to hold the attention, what chance is there for a single movement of a symphony, not to mention the entire work of which it's a part? And, more to the point, if all you're going to be listening to is quick-fix hits of favourite tunes, processed down to their bare essentials, why on earth would you want to invest in



Leema and Pro-Ject: going back to vinyl

a decent sound system on which to listen to them? Music is free, so why should you spend any money on the equipment to play it if you've already got a perfectly good phone in your pocket?

No, this isn't another of those 'phones sound dreadful' rants: for casual listening there's a lot to be said for only having one device in your pocket, linked to a pair of Bluetooth headphones for ultimate convenience – well, as long as your phone isn't one of those that chews its way through its battery life when playing music or eats up your data allowance when accessing online streaming services. I mean, you never know when you might need that battery life and data for an emergency like taking a selfie and uploading it to 'soshul meejah'.

**If a three-minute burst of music is two minutes too long, what chance is there for a symphony?**

However, just as the sound of many recordings – non-classical so far, thank goodness – seems now to be tailored for this 'instant hit' way of listening, so I have encountered quite a few pieces of allegedly hi-fi equipment of late with a similar balance. Headphones are a particular culprit, if recent experience is any guide, with overblown 'exciting' bass much in evidence: for 'exciting' read thick and muddy, seemingly designed for those wanting just the visceral thrill of something thudding in their ears, rather than the whole picture of the music.

As an experiment, I tried playing some of my back seat drivers' music to them through a decent system, and wasn't quite

prepared for the reaction I got. I thought, in my naivety, that it made the sound much better, even though the recordings were by no means of demonstration quality; but the reaction was that there was no difference – 'What am I supposed to be hearing, actually?' – and that I'd wasted my money on what I considered a decent system.

Explaining all this to an acquaintance in the audio industry, he laughed and said, 'See, I never thought you'd become a "back to analogue" purist', but that isn't the point at all: in my listening life, the majority of the music I play is now computer-sourced, be it rips or downloads, and much of it sounds exceptionally good. Listening to the Qobuz hi-res downloads of this magazine's monthly Editor's Choice selections is a regular joy in discovering new recordings and unfamiliar works, and while I am just as happy listening to the 320kbps Radio 3 'hi-res' stream, even these ancient ears can tell the difference between a compressed audio file and one at CD quality. And what's more, I can do so even on the (admittedly rather good) system in the car, let alone my desk or main systems at home. Or indeed the little Chord Mojo/Poly reviewed on page 116, used with a reasonable pair of headphones.

But then maybe the light at the end of the tunnel is coming from an unexpected source. As I observe in this month's audio news, the signs are that the renaissance of vinyl records is breaking free from the slightly affected hipster trend I'd long thought it to be – although I realise many never stopped playing them – and moving into the mainstream. Yes, you can spend a lot of money on a turntable, but there are also affordable choices available from companies such as Rega, Teac and (especially) Pro-Ject; and with the likes of that last company's JukeBox E – or, at a different level, the Leema Pulse IV amplifier also in the news this month – it's possible to have a fine-sounding turntable combined with amplification and even Bluetooth streaming, all in a package requiring nothing more than the addition of a pair of speakers.

Of course, even a £499 bundle might not tempt those for who music is free and the means of playing it only costs £20 a month or so, but hopefully it's progress in the right direction. ☺

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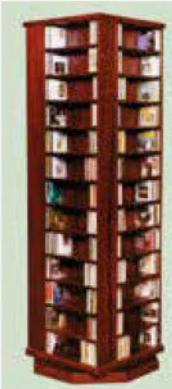
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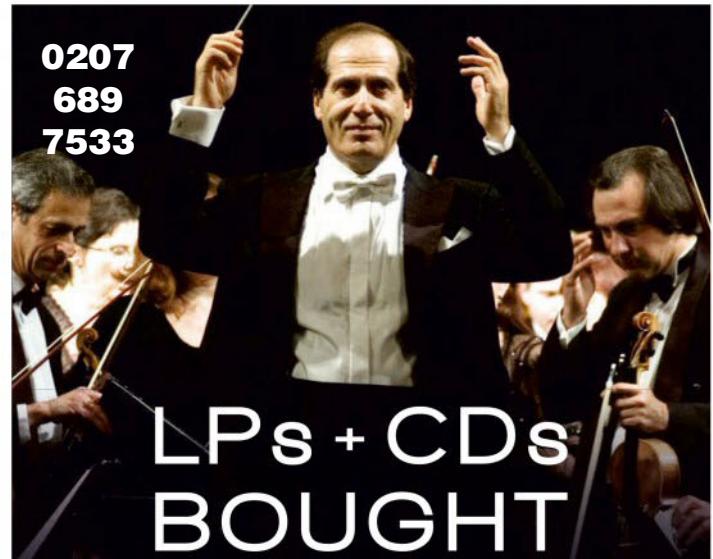
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# NOTES & LETTERS

Teodor Currentzis's Tchaikovsky · Karajan in concert · Championing British symphonies

Write to us at *Gramophone*, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or [gramophone@markallengroup.com](mailto:gramophone@markallengroup.com)

## Currentzis's Tchaikovsky

The arrival of the January issue was most welcome as we stumbled uncertainly into a new year; and, to my mind, it was a reminder of the continuing relevance and importance of classical music, of the recording and acquisition of new interpretations of familiar masterpieces and, yes, of your magazine as an erudite guide to them. Unusually, I had already acquired two of the CDs reviewed in that issue: Peter Quantrill's review (page 30) of one of them confirmed my conclusion that Teodor Currentzis's 'unsettling' Tchaikovsky Sixth really does deserve to be listened to in the company 'of the most exalted of comparisons'.

Like PQ, I turned to Leonard Bernstein for comparison – not his later DG account, though, but his 1964 NYPO version, also on Sony Classical, which to my mind has been criminally undervalued. Neither he nor Currentzis gives safe or comfortable performances of this or any other work, because they offer so much to, but also demand much from, the listener. And often, even those convinced by their overall vision may struggle with details. Is Currentzis's 'question and answer' approach in the first movement a 'happy inspiration' or fussiness that will irritate increasingly over time?

As PQ states, 'it's early days', but his excellent review makes clear why this new version must be heard, and exactly what to expect. Yes, the conductor's exhalation at the start of the finale not only out-does Bernstein, but 'out-Nelsons' even Andris Nelsons's heavy breathing! And the latter's CBSO reading (*Orfeo*, 5/11) is another modern *Pathétique* not to be overlooked. It's the sound of the new Sony Classical recording, however, where I must confess some disappointment. Perhaps, as PQ would have it, I'm missing the point of how it's at one with the performance, and it's undoubtedly exciting, with real bite from the strings, but is it also contrived and claustrophobic at times? The old CBS sound provided to the NYPO has rarely been hailed as state of the art but, free from the appalling noise that used to emanate from some of their LPs, I was surprised to feel, at times, that the 1964 Bernstein recording sounded clearer and, yes, more musically satisfying than the newcomer: try the third movement, and does the

## Letter of the Month



Never too loud: Gerald Moore, whose sensitivity and wit are fondly remembered by many

## Why Gerald Moore was a great musician

I was born on October 10, 1923, the year that *The Gramophone* was first published, and I've been receiving the magazine for as long as I can remember.

I was interested to read Graham Johnson's Icons feature (February, page 52) on the accompanist Gerald Moore. On October 8, 1962, he visited the Southend Music Club and gave a recital and lecture called 'Illustrations at the Piano'. I talked to him afterwards and he signed his book, *Am I Too Loud?*,

for me. It's very funny – much like the man himself was. I still have the programme from that evening. I've kept cuttings of all his reviews, too, and I have most of his recordings on LP (and some on CD as well).

Gerald Moore was a truly great musician. Perhaps I'm biased, but I genuinely believe there was no other accompanist like him, before or since.

Ivor Blankfield  
Southend on Sea, Essex

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tam-tam stroke in the finale register more effectively in downtown Manhattan? I am not a vinyl junkie, but I am not convinced that this new version is the best advert for up-to-date recorded sound, or that it will convince those who yearn for analogue. Nevertheless, an undoubted record of the month!

Anthony Smith  
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

## Karajan live

I entirely agree with Rob Cowan's excellent review of the live Karajan/

Philharmonia Concerts on ICA Classics (January, page 44).

This set me thinking about truly live (ie unpatched) performances versus studio recordings. Some conductors, Beecham for example, could generate almost as much adrenalin in the recording studio as in a live performance. Even then, his live performances often seem to have that extra spark (try the excellent studio performances of Berlioz overtures against the live ones).

The Karajan discs seem to generate that extra white heat (as Rob Cowan says, the

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Mozart symphony finales ‘truly going for the burn’). Sir James Galway, Principal Flute of the Berlin Philharmonic in the 1970s, has said that Karajan in the studio was very good, but that Karajan live in the concert hall produced something extra. Other works in this set include Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony and Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole*, and show just as much excitement. These mid-1950s Philharmonia concerts certainly demonstrate exactly what Sir James meant. Applause is retained and you can hear how well received these performances were.

This is an essential disc and a rare opportunity to hear Karajan live with the Philharmonia. Let’s hope there are more recordings like this.

*Tony Williams, via email*

### More British symphonies ...

I was interested to read Andrew Lewis’s letter (January, page 125) bemoaning the lack of British symphonies in concert programmes. It was this very reason – the lack of live performances of British works (those few that were fortunate enough to have made it into the popular cliques aside) – that prompted me to establish the English Music Festival 15-odd years ago. Although funding is incredibly difficult (we receive no governmental support or corporate sponsorship whatsoever), Mr Lewis may be pleased to hear that we have nevertheless managed to include a number of British symphonies in our programmes over the years. These include the world premiere performances of symphonies by Montague Phillips, York Bowen (No 1) and Moeran (No 2) and

renditions of Parry’s Third, Sullivan’s *Irish*, Bantock’s *Celtic* and Holst’s *Cotswolds* symphonies, alongside giving the world premiere performances of nearly 100 (mainly 20th-century) works such as Bax’s Variations for Orchestra, Delius’s *Hiawatha* and numerous works by Vaughan Williams.

*Em Marshall-Luck  
Founder-Director,  
The English Music Festival*

### ... and more string quartets

*Gramophone* has made a good start in the new year! I am thinking especially of January’s features on the three Järvis, on Martyn Brabbins (long overdue!) conducting Tippett and on the Melos Quartet. I wish someone, perhaps one of your regular reviewers, would write a book about the great string quartets, to join Harold Schonberg’s *The Great Pianists* and Margaret Campbell’s *The Great Violinists* on my shelf. This may soon require two volumes in view of the many excellent quartets emerging in this century! I also hope you will print more articles about meritorious British artists of the older generation (David Atherton, Owain Arwel Hughes and Howard Shelley come to mind, among others).

*Bruno H Repp  
North Haven, CT, USA*

### Editorial note

*Hugo Shirley writes:* In my review (February, page 78) of the complete Claudio Abbado opera recordings for DG I erroneously stated that dialogue was omitted from *Fidelio*. It is in fact included, as on the original release.

## NEXT MONTH APRIL 2018



**Robin Ticciati:  
a tale of two cities**  
As he leaves the orchestra he transformed – the Scottish Chamber Orchestra – for Berlin’s DSO, Ticciati talks to James Jolly about how he views the role of the conductor in 2018

## OBITUARY

A fine pianist and conductor, known for championing Russian music

### IGOR ZHUKOV

*Pianist, conductor and sound engineer  
Born August 31, 1936  
Died January 26, 2018*



A pupil of pianists Emil Gilels and Heinrich Neuhaus, Zhukov was raised in Moscow, graduating from the city’s Conservatory in 1960, the year he took second prize at the Long-Thibaud Competition in Paris. As well as performing as a pianist, he also conducted the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, which he founded, and played in the

Zhukov Piano Trio alongside Grigory and Valentin Feighin from 1963 to 1980 (they recorded the Tchaikovsky Piano Trio for HMV Melodiya in 1977).

Among Zhukov’s recordings as a pianist are the Rimsky-Korsakov Piano Concerto and various concertante works by Tchaikovsky and Scriabin (with Rohzdestvensky and Mikhail Jurowski for HMV – Zhukov on ‘battling good form’ according to *Gramophone*’s Rob Cowan), as well as the First Piano Concertos by Balakirev and Medtner (Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga). In the early 1970s he recorded a set of solo Scriabin, including a staggering performance of the Seventh Sonata.

## Festivals Guide

Our annual guide to the best classical music festivals across the UK, Europe and North America

### Handel’s Saul

With its Shakespearean variety of character, psychological insight and opulent orchestration, Handel’s 1738 oratorio is one of the composer’s supreme achievements. Richard Wigmore chooses his favourite recordings

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Various Cpsrs Smile - Wks for Db & Pf. <i>Desimpelaere, D &amp; E.</i>	(F) <b>CDS7809</b>	Marais Pièces de violes. <i>Rêveuse.</i> (F) <b>MIR386</b>	
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Beethoven Pf Conc No 1 <i>Strauss, R Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche. Randau/Estonian Nat SO/Järvi, N.</i>	(F) <b>ERP8916</b>	<b>MIRARE</b>	<a href="#">mirare.fr</a>
<b>ETCETERA</b>	<a href="#">etcetera-records.com</a>	Brahms Pf Conc No 1 <i>Stravinsky</i> Conc for Pf & Winds.	
Hermann Forbidden Music in World War II. <i>Various artists.</i>	(B) ② <b>KTC1590</b>	Berezovsky/Svetlanov SO. (F) <b>MIR340</b>	
Various Cpsrs Luther, the Noble Art of Music. <i>Utopia/Inalto.</i>	(F) <b>KTC1577</b>	Marais Pièces de violes. <i>Rêveuse.</i> (F) <b>MIR386</b>	
Various Cpsrs Made in Belgium: New Belgian Chor Wks. <i>Brussels Chbr Ch/Cassano.</i>	(F) <b>KTC1601</b>	Schubert Wanderer - Wks for Vc & Pf. <i>Salque/Le Guay.</i> (F) <b>MIR324</b>	
<b>EVIDENCE</b>		<b>MODE</b>	<a href="#">moderecords.com</a>
Telemann Voyageur virtuose. <i>Ens Amarillis/Gaillard.</i>	(F) <b>EVD041</b>	Xenakis Orch Wks. <i>Tamayo.</i> (F) <b>MODE299</b>	
<b>FIRST HAND</b>	<a href="#">firsthandrecords.com</a>	<b>MPS</b>	
Schumann Pf Son No 1. Pf Wks. <i>Golka.</i>	(F) <b>FHR62</b>	Anonymous Gregorian Chants (r1974). <i>Capella Antiqua, Munich/Ruhland.</i> (B) ③ <b>0300949MSW</b>	
<b>FONDAMENTA</b>	<a href="#">fondamenta.fr</a>	<b>MUSICAL CONCEPTS</b>	<a href="#">musicalconcepts.net</a>
Brahms Two Va Sons. <i>Bashmet, Y &amp; K.</i>	(F) <b>FON1802030</b>	Chopin Polonaises. <i>Kvapil.</i> (M) <b>MC3103</b>	
<b>FUGA LIBERA</b>	<a href="#">outhere-music.com/fugalibera</a>	<b>MUSIQUE EN WALLONIE</b>	<a href="#">musiwall.ulga.be</a>
Beethoven Eternal Love - Pf Wks. <i>Kuijken, P.</i>	(F) <b>FUG745</b>	Saint-Luc Lute Wks. <i>Mascardi.</i> (F) <b>MEW1786</b>	
<b>GEGA NEW</b>	<a href="#">english.geganew.com</a>	<b>MYRIOS</b>	<a href="#">myriosmusic.com</a>
Shostakovich Syms Nos 5 & 6. <i>Bulgarian Nat RSO/Tabakov.</i>	(F) ② <b>GD385</b>	Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue. Pf Conc. <i>Gerstein/St Louis SO/Robertson.</i> (F) <b>MYR022</b>	
<b>GLOSSA</b>	<a href="#">glossamusic.com</a>	<b>NAXOS</b>	<a href="#">naxos.com</a>
Chopin Late Pf Wks. <i>Torbianelli.</i>	(F) <b>GCD922517</b>	Beethoven Wks for Fl, Vol 1. <i>Seo/Gallois/Kodama/Sezaki/Komine.</i> (M) <b>8 573569</b>	
Frescobaldi Affetti amorosi. <i>Banquet Céleste/Guillon.</i>	(F) <b>GCD923702</b>	Bettinelli Chbr Wks. <i>Trio Bettinelli/Duo Perugini-Pianezzola.</i> (M) <b>8 573836</b>	
Various Cpsrs Neapolitan Concs for Various Insts. <i>Ritirata/Obrigón.</i>	(F) <b>GCD923106</b>	Busoni Pf Wks, Vol 10. <i>Harden.</i> (M) <b>8 573806</b>	
<b>GOD RECORDS</b>	<a href="#">godrec.com</a>	Daugherty Dreamachine. <i>Glennie/Albany SO/Miller, DA.</i> (M) <b>8 559807</b>	
Jeck Vinyl Coda III-IV. <i>Jeck.</i>	(F) ② (G) <b>GOD48</b>	Hearne, Lang, D. Lash Statements. <i>Yale Chor Artists/Douma.</i> (M) <b>8 559829</b>	
<b>HARMONIA MUNDI</b>	<a href="#">harmoniamundi.com</a>	Hovhaness Suite for Band. October Mountain. Ruins of Ani. <i>Central Washington University Wind Ens.</i> (M) <b>8 559837</b>	
Bartók Pf Conc No 3. Conc for Orch. <i>Perianes/Munich PO/Heras-Casado.</i>	(F) <b>HMM90 2262</b>	Karayev Vn Conc. Sym No 1. <i>Gandelman/Kiev Virtuosi SO/Yablonsky.</i> (M) <b>8 573722</b>	
Forqueray, A & J-B Tournments de l'âme - Cpte Wks. <i>Dévérité/Uemura/Terakado.</i>	(S) ⑤ <b>HMM90 5286/9</b>	Martinú Songs, Vol 5. <i>Hrochová/Koukl.</i> (M) <b>8 573823</b>	
Handel Concerti a due cori. <i>Freiburg Baroque Orch/von der Goltz/Müllerjans.</i>	(F) <b>HMM90 5272</b>	Prokofiev Romeo & Juliet. <i>Baltimore SO/Alosop.</i> (M) ② <b>8 573534/5</b>	
Mahler Sym No 9. <i>Swedish RSO/Harding.</i>	(F) <b>HMM90 2258</b>	Sauret Études-caprices, Vol 2. <i>Rashidova.</i> (M) <b>8 573843</b>	
Various Cpsrs Baltic Voices, Vols 1-3. <i>Estonian Philh Chbr Ch/Hillier.</i>	(B) ③ (G) <b>HMX290 8793/5</b>	Wagner Ring des Nibelungen - orch excs. <i>Buffalo PO/Falletta.</i> (M) <b>8 573839</b>	
Various Cpsrs Four Pieces - Four Pfs. <i>Melnikov.</i>	(F) <b>HMM90 2299</b>	Various Cpsrs Gtr Wks of Mexico. <i>Perera.</i> (M) <b>8 573674</b>	
<b>HYPERION</b>	<a href="#">hyperion-records.co.uk</a>	Various Cpsrs Span of Time. <i>Lloyd Webber, J.</i> (S) ④ (G) <b>8 504053</b>	
Bach, JS Mass in B minor. <i>Trinity Coll Ch, Cambridge/OAE/Layton.</i>	(F) ② <b>CD46181/2</b>	<b>NORTHERN FLOWERS</b>	<a href="#">nflowers.ru</a>
Falla Fantasia Baetica. Pf Wks. <i>Ohlsson.</i>	(F) <b>CD46177</b>	Slonimsky, SM Sym No 2. Voice from the Chorus (r1977-79). <i>Rozhdestvensky.</i> (F) <b>NFPM49123</b>	
Ludford Missa Videte miraculum. Missa Ave Maria, ancilla Trinitatis. <i>Westminster Abbey Ch/O'Donnell.</i>	(F) <b>CDA68192</b>	<b>PAN CLASSICS</b>	
Sterndale Bennett Pf Concs Nos 1-3. <i>Shelley/BBC Scottish SO.</i>	(F) <b>CDA68178</b>	Huppertz Metropolis. <i>Berlin RSO/Strobel.</i> (F) ② <b>PC10365</b>	
<b>KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE</b>	<a href="#">kings.cam.ac.uk</a>	Various Cpsrs Arias for Silvio Gargiotti. <i>Miesenburger/Neue Wiener Hofkapelle.</i> (F) <b>PC10372</b>	
Various Cpsrs Love from King's. <i>King's Men.</i>	(F) <b>KGS0023</b>	<b>PARATY</b>	<a href="#">new.paraty.fr</a>
<b>LINN</b>	<a href="#">linnrecords.com</a>	Berg, Brahms Wks for Cl & Pf. <i>Comte/Pascal.</i> (F) <b>PARATY517158</b>	
Adler One Lives But Once: A 90th Birthday Celebration. <i>Brandenburg St Orch, Frankfurt/Freeman Brown.</i>		Maria Pièces de viole. <i>Fuoco e Cenere/Bernfeld.</i> (F) <b>PARATY417164</b>	
Beethoven Wks for Winds. <i>SCO Wind Sols.</i>	(F) <b>CKD572</b>	Mompou Música callada. <i>Ader.</i> (F) <b>PARATY617160</b>	
<b>LORELT</b>	<a href="#">lorelt.co.uk</a>	<b>PARNASSUS</b>	<a href="#">parnassusrecords.com</a>
Williams, G My Last Duchess - Songs. <i>Williams, JH/Fan/Green.</i>	(F) <b>LNT140</b>	Dvorák, Smetana, Suk Stg Qts (r1928). <i>Bohemian Qt.</i> (M) ① (G) <b>PACD96058</b>	
<b>MARIINSKY</b>	<a href="#">mariinskylabel.com</a>	Various Cpsrs Pf Wks (pp1965). <i>Richter.</i> (B) ② <b>PACD96061/2</b>	
Prokofiev, Rachmaninov Pf Concs No 2. <i>Matsuev/Mariinsky Orch/Gergiev.</i>	(F) <b>MAR0599</b>	<b>PENTATONE</b>	<a href="#">pentatonemusic.com</a>
<b>MIRARE</b>		Beethoven Sym No 9. <i>Bavarian RSO/Kubelik.</i> (F) ② (G) <b>PTC5186 253</b>	
Various Cpsrs Music of the Americas. <i>Houston SO/Orozco-Estrada.</i>		Hindemith Sym Metamorphosis. <i>Nobilissima visione.</i> WDR SO/Janowski. (F) <b>PTC5186 672</b>	
<b>MODE</b>	<a href="#">moderecords.com</a>	Mahler Sym No 4. <i>Persson/Luxembourg PO/Gimeno.</i> (F) ② (G) <b>PTC5186 651</b>	
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Various Cpsrs Our Lady Queen of Peace. <i>Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum/Etherington/Bell.</i>		<b>PIANO CLASSICS</b>	<a href="#">piano-classics.com</a>
<b>MUSICAL CONCEPTS</b>	<a href="#">musicalconcepts.net</a>	Bach, JS Org Wks. <i>Knizhev.</i> (F) <b>PCL10121</b>	
Various Cpsrs Wanderer - Wks for Vc & Pf. <i>Salque/Le Guay.</i>		Scriabin Pf Wks. <i>Dacić.</i> (F) <b>PCL10136</b>	
<b>MYRIOS</b>	<a href="#">myriosmusic.com</a>		
<b>NAXOS</b>	<a href="#">naxos.com</a>		
Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue. Pf Conc. <i>Gerstein/St Louis SO/Robertson.</i>		Copland Conducts Copland (pp1976). <i>Goodman/Los Angeles PO/Copland.</i> (F) <b>PMP 2 110397; (G) NBD0068V</b>	
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<b>PRAGA DIGITALS</b>	<a href="#">pragadigitals.com</a>		
Various Cpsrs Cinema - Original Film Soundtracks (arr for pf). <i>Palombi.</i>		Brahms Pf Qnt. Cl Qnt. Serkin/Oppenheim/Budapest Qt. (F) ② <b>PRD250 390</b>	
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<b>RADIO FRANCE ÉDITIONS</b>	<a href="#">editions.radiofrance.fr</a>		
Bach, JS. Escaich Convergences - Org Wks. <i>Ospital.</i>		Bach, JS. Escaich Convergences - Org Wks. <i>Ospital.</i> (F) TEM316060	
<b>REGEANT</b>			
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<b>RICERCAR</b>			
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Various Cpsrs Hunting Music of the Old Czech Masters. <i>Collegium Musicum Pragensae/Prague SO/Vajnar.</i>		Various Cpsrs Hunting Music of the Old Czech Masters. <i>Collegium Musicum Pragensae/Prague SO/Vajnar.</i> (F) <b>SU4240-2</b>	
<b>SIGNUM</b>			
Davis, O Liberty. <i>RPO/Bateman.</i>		Davis, O Liberty. <i>RPO/Bateman.</i> (F) <b>SIGCD522</b>	
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<b>TYXART</b>			
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## DVD & BLU-RAY

<b>ACCENTUS</b>	<a href="#">supraphon.com</a>
Dvořák Sym No 9. Songs. <i>Opolais/Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch/Nelsons.</i>	(F) <b>DVD ACC20419; (G) BD ACC10419</b>
Massenet Werther (pp2017). <i>Sols inc Flórez, Stéphanie &amp; Petit/Zurich Op/Meister.</i>	(F) <b>DVD ACC20427; (G) BD ACC10427</b>
<b>BEL AIR CLASSIQUES</b>	<a href="#">txyart.de</a>
Rimsky-Korsakov Golden Cockerel (pp2016). <i>Sols incl Hunka/Monnaie, Brussels/Altinoglu.</i>	(F) <b>DVD BAC147; (G) BD BAC447</b>
<b>CMAJOR ENTERTAINMENT</b>	
Bruckner Sym No 1 (pp2017). <i>Staatskapelle Dresden/Thielemann.</i>	(F) <b>DVD 744608; (G) BD 744704</b>
Puccini Tosca, Act 2 (pp1964). <i>Sols incl Callas/Royal Op/Cillario.</i>	(F) <b>DVD 745008; (G) BD 745104</b>
<b>CRUX PRODUCTIONS</b>	<a href="#">johnbriccut.com</a>
Delius Pleasures of Delius. <i>Various artists.</i>	(F) <b>DVD CRUXGZ003DVD</b>
Elgar Man Behind the Mask. <i>Various artists.</i>	(F) <b>DVD CRUXGZ002DVD</b>
Various Cpsrs Passions of Vaughan Williams. <i>Various artists.</i>	(F) <b>DVD CRUXGZ001DVD</b>
<b>DYNAMIC</b>	<a href="#">dynamic.it</a>
Meyerbeer Margherita d'Anjou. <i>Sols/Italian Intl Orch/Luisi.</i>	(F) <b>DVD 37802</b>
<b>NAXOS</b>	<a href="#">naxos.com</a>
Copland Conducts Copland (pp1976). <i>Goodman/Los Angeles PO/Copland.</i>	(F) <b>DVD 2 110397; (G) NBD0068V</b>
Various Cpsrs Belcanto: The Tenors of the 78 Era. <i>Various artists.</i>	(F) ⑥ (G) ② + (B) <b>DVD 2 110389/91; (G) NBD0063/4V</b>

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# Chris Riddell

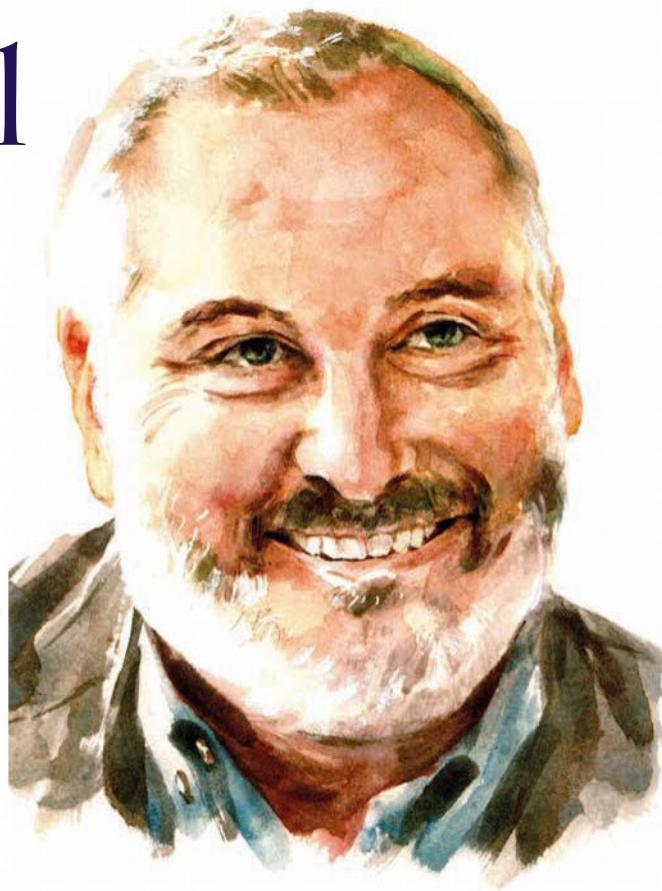
The illustrator and former Children's Laureate describes how he uses music to inspire his art

**A**bout five years ago I updated my phone, and found myself in possession of a smartphone that at the click of a button could post things on social media. So I started to take random photos of sketch books and people seemed to enjoy that. Then I started spending a lot of time sitting on trains, and I used to put my headphones on and listen to whatever was on my iPod and draw to it, and again that got a response. And I started to think it might be fun to start to draw live to music. I ran into a band at BBC Radio 6 called The Leisure Society – I'd been listening to their song on the train, arrived, and there was the band in the foyer! They invited me to come along to one of their performances at Somerset House, and I found myself sitting on a stool at the back of the stage drawing and live streaming while the band played to this enormous audience. And really it went from there.

I drew during the National Youth Orchestra's Prom last year. I wasn't able to get to it so I listened from my studio and just Periscoped the drawings and paintings I did. I then sent the drawing to Sarah Alexandra [NYO Chief Executive and Artistic Director] and that's where the idea of becoming an Illustrator-in-Residence took shape. It's quite experimental for all of us. We're figuring out what my interaction with the performance might be. I've done some paintings that will be projected during Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and it's been a lovely interaction. It's allowed me to sit and respond visually to a piece of music, and the extra element is that I'll be able to go along and sit while they perform and draw live, as a member of the audience, almost as a piece of reportage.

I think it's about accessibility. Sometimes music fits into genres and labels, and we live in a world which is very conscious of those things and part of different disciplines coming together collaboratively is that you can break down some of those labels. The visual works very well with music-making and something I was very interested in during my two years as Children's Laureate was, wherever possible, finding ways to draw live to music because it seemed that was a bridge to bringing different audiences in. People who enjoyed my work as an illustrator then would listen to music that they might not have encountered.

I had an extraordinary experience last year at the Hay Festival, drawing while Joanna MacGregor played Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. I was sitting by the piano, and they projected what I was drawing on a screen – it was completely thrilling to me. I didn't work anything out, I just drew as if I was listening to the music in the privacy of the studio as it were. Depending on the variation I could spend longer on a drawing, and maybe it would overlap and go into another variation. I thought I'd make it figurative and so I drew a series of faces that came to me as I was listening. At one



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extraordinary moment, when I was drawing a kid's curl on the forehead of a figure, the audience laughed, and I don't think that often happens. It changed the atmosphere. Joanna was brilliant, she went with that and incorporated it into the performance.

I'm an illustrator for children principally, and so much of what I do is figurative, often metaphorical, allegorical – things that work well when I'm listening to a piece of music. In the studio I tune into Radio 3, and that becomes the soundtrack to my working day. In some sense I am sometimes illustrating something about the music, but sometimes it's simply drawing to the accompaniment of music. Something rather abstract and strident will lead to a certain type of drawing and something lyrical and pastoral will lead me into Greek myths.

If I'm travelling on a train up to London, and it's a crowded carriage and I'm feeling disgruntled, there's nothing better than to put on Bach's cello suites, and you just relax, and you think everything's fine, it doesn't matter, I can get my sketch book out and draw and have this wonderful cello playing. And getting on the crowded underground, that wouldn't do at all, so I put on Philip Glass, his solo piano music, because it's edgy and brooding and very urban – great for travelling through London with.



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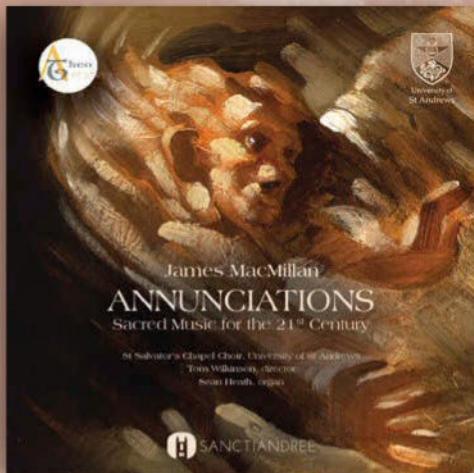
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